

**The Historical Development and Practice of Self-reliance  
in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus  
*with Special Reference to the Central Gibe Synod***

**Written as Partial Fulfillment of the Master's Degree  
in Theology**

**The School of Mission and Theology**

**By**

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## **Declaration**

**I SENBETO WAKENE** hereby declare that the work presented in this dissertation has not been presented by any other person for award of any degree in any university.

**Signature .....**

**Date .....**

**Supervisor: Prof. TORSTEIN JØRGENSEN**

**Signature.....**

**Date .....**

## **Aknowledgements**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ALM	American Lutheran Mission
CGS	Central Gibe Synod
CMS	Church Missionary Society
DASSC	Development And Social Services Commission
DEM	Danish Evangelical Mission
Dr	Doctor
EC	Executive Committee
EECMY	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
EOC	Ethiopian Orthodox Church
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
GA	General Assembly
GHM	German Hermannsburg Mission
NLM	Norwegian Lutheran Mission
NMS	Norwegian Mission Society
SEM	Swedish Evangelical Mission

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## **Introduction**

### **1.0 Purpose**

The aim of this thesis is to explore and discover the historical development and practice of self-reliance in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) with reference to the Central Gibe Synod's (CGS) use on the three self-principles of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson as an analytical tool.

I was motivated to do this research by two main reasons:

First, I have been serving in the EECMY for more than twenty five years at different posts. I have served as evangelist, pastor, parish coordinator, district leader, and synod president. During my service, I had the opportunity of practicing self-reliance in my synod. The efforts were effectively implemented with a vigorously sacrificial ministry. That was a great pleasure in my life.

Second, to see how the three self-principles of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson are relevant and applicable to my church. And also today self-reliance is an urgent need in the EECMY. So, promising progression is going on strengthening the initiated course of development in the EECMY-CGS regarding self-reliance.

### **1.1 Method**

The method used in this research on self-reliance in the Central Gibe Synod is basically based on a general historical approach. I start with an overview of the historical, development under the theoretical perspective of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson's three self-principles. The aim is to investigate to what extent these principles were implemented in the area of my study in the chosen period. One of the most difficult problems facing the African and Asian churches in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century was economic dependency and the paternalism by missionaries and foreign missionary organizations. The protestant mission leaders; Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson were aware that many churches supported by their societies were fragile, dependent, and not growing. Thus, as a remedy of these problems "the three self principles" (self-support, self-propagation, and self-government) were developed. From 1840-1870 there was a move towards the establishment of the three self-principles. Already in this early period conscious efforts were

made to develop a theoretical basis for churches to become independent from European control.<sup>1</sup> As my thesis is focused on the church's self-reliance, it is applicable to the African churches in general and Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church (EECMY) in particular. Africa is a continent wracked with so many problems; social, economical, political, ecological, religious, e.t.c. Due to these unfavorable circumstances dependency was created based on foreign funding and, the EECMY-CGS was not exception.

A church is however, an agent of change. She has to influence the society in bringing change. Her duty is to convey the prophetic healing message to the affected communities in order to bring life transformation, development, peace and reconciliation, and self-help in the aspects of financial stability, self-governing, and self-extension. The EECMY's volume of work increased as a result of growth in membership. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mission organizations from the West began the proclamation of the gospel. Then the life situation of people was deplorable. Hence, through good intentions they were compelled to assist the needy ones without a proper understanding of how to help. It was not easy to break the cycle, and a continuing dependency developed<sup>2</sup>. Since her establishment the leadership part was turned over to the indigenous leaders. But still in terms of financial resources, the church did not come to the attainment of fully self-support, so she is expected to do more on this aspect. Thus, my discussion will focus on the three following major themes:

- A. Historical development of the theory of the three self-principles of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson.
- B. Brief historical development of the EECMY self-reliance
- C. Historical development of the Central Gibe Synod practice on self-reliance

To collect the data for my research, during the summer of 2009 I did field research in the CGS using interviews and formal conversations. My previous work experience in the synod helped me

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, *The ideal of the self-governing church*, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Megerssa Guta, *EECMY's 50 Years Journey in, Fulfillment of God's Mission: 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee the Establishment of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus: Overview of the major in the past 50 years*, Addis Ababa, 2009, 1-2.



to collect and organize the data appropriately. Furthermore, my study is based on library reading from the School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, see the list of references below.

## 1.2 Disposition

This thesis is organized into five chapters:

Chapter one: It will focus on the historical development of theory of the three self-principles. This chapter examines the historical development of the three self-principles of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson on third world churches. It explores how the mission governed churches can develop into independent and indigenous churches on the basic principles of self-support, self-propagate, and self-government.

Chapter two: It expresses the brief historical development of the EECMY on self-principles.

In this I give an account of how the EECMY was founded from the very beginning. It expresses the desperate life of the people which forced the pioneer missionaries to render aid for the needy people and how this system of dependency was difficult to break. This circumstance created a situation in which the indigenous church heavily came to rely on sources from abroad.

Chapter three: It expresses the historical challenges of the Central Gibe Synod in the aspects of self-reliance.

It expounds how the CGS passed through difficult internal and external conflicts due to lacking funding. But it also discloses its success in that critical situation. The problem ended up with a new development and some kind of good result. The church to some extent overcame the financial dependency upon foreign funding by developing and generating local income, and in this way realized substantial aspects of the three-self-principles.

Chapter four: Historical foundation of the Central Gibe Synod.

This chapter gives an outline of how the CGS was founded and developed. In the beginning the synod encountered, and passed through severe persecution. But with heroic and vigorous service it continued its mission with the result of rapid growth and expansion.

Chapter five: It summarizes the weakness and strength aspects of the three self-principles and self-theologizing of the Central Gibe Synod. This conclusion chapter gives a brief out look to the

present day situation and challenges. It examines to what extent these self-principles are implemented in the EECMY and CGS. It examines the weakness and strength aspects of the three selfs.

### 1.3 Delimitation

It would have been good if I was able to discuss the historical development of all EECMY synods. But within the limited time and resources of a master thesis, this is unworkable. Rather I have limited myself to the Central Gibe Synod historical development of self-reliance. Hence, the discussion is focused on the Idjaji/ Central Gibe Synod development of self-reliance as a representative unit of EECMY, starting with the year 1998 up to 2007. The inception of self-reliance was initiated in 1990, and fully developed in 1998. In this year the Idjaji parish/CGS fully began to carry out its work by local resources. From that year until now the synod's evangelistic work is carried out by local resources.

### 1.4 Sources

This study makes use of written materials, official documents of the church, and oral interviews.

#### Ethiopian names

The name of an Ethiopian consists of a person's own first name followed by of his father. Thus, for example, the personal name may be Megerssa and his father's name Guta. To list a person according to the second name is therefore misleading. In bibliographies this causes a lot of confusion as Ethiopian names are found listed both according to first name and second name. In order to avoid this confusion I will list alphabetically by the first name.

#### Literature

Written materials are various books. Such as:

- A. *Historical development theory of three self-principles* which aimed at the establishment of third world independent indigenous churches without relying foreign on funding.
- B. *History of evangelical Christian missionary pioneers in Ethiopia and the founding of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.*

- C. *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*. It deals with making an idea or theology understandable, useful, and relevant with a given culture.
- D. *The Ideal of a Self-Governing church* dealing the empowering of indigenous ministers for the church leadership.
- E. *The Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church in the Ethiopian Revolution era*.

The books I used for my study from the library of the School of Mission and Theology are mostly relating to the self-reliance principles which are based on the theory of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson's theoretical self-reliance. In this study the written materials are used as guidance for the application of these principles. In addition, this study helped me to asses and to evaluate the weakness and the strength of my church in the aspects of the three self-principles, and also, broadened my understanding of self-reliance.

Official church documents; These contain the minutes of the church's General Assembly, and Executive Committee, and also the Central Gibe Synod; General Assembly, Executive Committee, and synod officers.

Oral interviews have been carried out with nine persons. The most substantial information turned out to be given by the following six persons:

1. Rev. Asfaw Terfassa, the current Central Synod president.
2. Mr. Debela Kanaa, the former Central Synod Development and Social Services Director and the current Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development And Social Services Commission(EECMY DASSC) relief department coordinator.
3. Rev. Diba Abetu, member of the Central Gibe synod officers and the synod establishment committee.
4. Mr. Emmanuel Abraham, former EECMY president (1963-1985).
5. Mr. Kanaa Aboma, one of the first founders of the Idjai parish.
6. Rev. Megerssa Guta, the former General Secretary of EECMY for 12 years.

The status of my informants is varied with regard to, age, education, religious experiences, and ecclestical position. So I will use my personal experience as a source for certain aspects.

## Chapter One

### 1. TERMS AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE THEORY OF THE THREE SELF-PRINCIPLES

#### 1.1 Historical development of the theory of the three self principles.

In the mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century two prominent missionary leaders; Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society in England, and Rufus Anderson of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, pioneered a new church planting strategy. The need for a new strategy motivated them to elaborate what came to be called the three-self principles; self-support, self-propagation, and self-governing.<sup>3</sup> They presented the formula of the three self-principles, a strategy of mission thinking, to the second generation of leaders of the missionary movement in order to respond to the extreme paternalism exercised by western missionaries. They discovered this formula from the field experience of various persons through Bible study. The three formula of missionary strategy were created by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson between 1840-1870.

According to their theory, young churches on the mission field would gain their independence on the basis of the three principles. Their main objective was to establish a theory about how mission governed churches in the third world could develop into independent and indigenous church as the basic principles of self-support, self-propagation and self-governing were launched. The basic aim was to bring these churches way from subordination and dependency on Western imperial domination. The three principles; self-government, self-support, self-propagation are interconnected. Self-support is a prerequisite for self-government and is the foundation of self-propagation. And all three should be accomplished for full independence to be established. The aim was to make local churches independent and mature enough to function by their own leaders, ministers and funding without missionary help. The methodology met some initial resistance from conservative missionaries and also some African ministers, but gradually it was accepted.

Rufus Anderson was critical to what he saw as a growing ecclesiastical colonialism making carbon copies of western churches in Africa and Asia. Instead he encouraged African and Asian

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<sup>3</sup> In Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson's terminology the term "self-support" is used the same way as the term "self-reliance" is used in the EECMY. In references to Venn and Anderson's work I apply their terminology. Otherwise I apply the term common in my context.

Christians to establish churches with a foot hold their own cultural soil.<sup>4</sup> He believed that Africans were capable of the same attainment as Europeans and formulated a scheme for the organization of indigenous churches in order to put them in line with Europeans as self-support, self-propagating, and self-governing units. His goal was to encourage indigenous churches to bring them out from subordination and dependency. Anderson pointed out that when the churches economically become self-support they could then be fully self-governing. Church economic Self-support and Self-governing are interrelated. As long as a church depended on abroad funding, it is impossible to translate the three selves into practice. Thus his intention was to reinforce that subordination and dependency by moving churches toward self-support through the imposition of a rigid economy.<sup>5</sup> So Anderson and Venn pushed to raise up indigenous agency who would think and act as the missionaries did on their basis of resources and human power. Anderson and Venn's understanding of Christianity does not aim at removing indigenous leaders and Christians from their own people, but adapting to their culture and social life. So, if Christianity is provided by Christian missionaries properly and appropriately, according to the three selves' principle, it would be preserving and strengthening the culture of the indigenous people. In addition to this, education within the context of the indigenous setting is a power through which the improvement of social life is restored by diffusing or extending of industry, civil liberty, social order, family government, with the means of a respectable livelihood and well-ordered community. The Christian mission is in this way intended as instrumental to heal the culture and identity, those cultural aspects, which were mistreated by colonialists. Education should promote, not weaken the culture of the people. Education and training should be the means of promoting and developing indigenous in order to assist their own people to enlighten them.<sup>6</sup> Both of the pioneer thinkers encouraged the national churches to get involved in evangelism and their own mission work in order to strengthen indigenous young churches. The aim was to remove the inferiority of African and Asian indigenous and to make them competent to serve their own people in every aspect. This would be entail the social healing and welfare by empowering the national churches to take over the leadership in any a responsible ways.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>4</sup> Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology*, 52, 53, 64, 65.

<sup>5</sup> Harris, *Nothing but Christ*, 114.

<sup>6</sup> Williams, *The Ideal of the Self-Governing Church*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 194.

The three-self principles of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson as a remedy for independency in the missionary churches became widely influential. The formula modeled in the course of the following decades became a good means for African and Asian churches to set them free from the western colonialism. For both of them, the grand aim of missionary work was the building of genuinely indigenous churches in the mission fields. The main idea was strategically formulated in the three principles of self-support, self-governing, self-propagation. This aim created a strong influence on African and Asian churches. Some African, Chinese, and Korean church ministers got the opportunity of shaping their churches according to their local Christianity which they regarded as a realization of the universality of the church, and also enabled them to run and govern their church affairs by their own authority without foreign interference. Certainly, there was a challenge from some missionaries who were interested in collaboration with western imperialistic rulers, and also there was internal resistance from some African indigenous pastors who expected on the basis of missionary funding to live better than their own impoverished believers. According to Venn, the church work, which is fully depended on foreign mission is the scaffolding; the indigenous church is the edifice. Many mission works were unable to stand without of the scaffolding. So, the true sustainable church work should be supported and embraced by local Christians. Thus, they are deeply integrated into the local church life.

Generally, Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson provided a guiding principle for world mission to omit dependency on foreign mission by promoting indigenous Christians to exercise their own faith and use their own leadership and their resource for evangelism.

## 1.2 The three Self-principles

Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson advocated the three self theory. The theory brought about some attempts to change things, though mostly at a superficial level, by putting nationals in charge of the churches. The vision of this formula was to identify the ultimate goal the missionary enterprise as the planting of local churches that would become self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing. Their idea was to push the foreign missionaries to play a great role of introducing to indigenous people it in their own languages, in doing so to bring them to Christianity and eventually these Christians would grow in the faith and become capable of adapting Christianity and leading their own churches. This formula along with end of colonialism led a sudden interest in mission circles to indigenize local churches. It became

popular in developing nations to make them independent in the second half of the twentieth century. The theory was considered enlightened missiology for nearly a century. I have now focused on this formula in the following subtopics in order to give more specific presentation of the three self as described in the following sections.

### 1.2.1 Self-support

A self-supporting church is, according to Anderson's and Venn's an indigenous church that is able to operate by local resources on levels in line with its own financial abilities, without depending on abroad missionaries' fund or material help. An indigenous church that is financially self-reliant is a national church that is capable to pay salaries for its workers and meets the expenses of its regular services. Anderson and Venn pointed out that the self-supporting young churches would gain a sense autonomy and true brotherly hood equality. The more the church has its own resources and financial capacity, the better she grows. The aim is to feel full responsibility to bear the burden of supporting the life of the church financially. In so doing, the indigenous church members develop their lives to integrate to the church's life. The final test of the integrity of the church is the readiness to evangelize and extend itself.<sup>8</sup>

According to Venn, when financial self-support is implemented in the indigenous church, the indigenous ministers will be motivated to evangelize their own people and other people. Thus, since self-propagation is related to self-support, and also paves way for local congregations' members to evangelize with their own fund and talents. Self-support and self-extension flourish on independence of the indigenous church from the Missionary and his Society. The task of foreign missionary is to go where there is as yet no local church to establish an indigenous church. Once an indigenous church is functioning, a foreign missionary should move on. Once a three formulas are practised and adopted within a society, an indigenous church under the indigenous pastors and Episcopate can become independent of foreign aid and superintendence. The more local pastors evangelize their own indigenous ways by appropriate service, the more they get know each other with local congregations. In so doing, the indigenous pastors can create the awareness and commitment of local fund raising. The sickness of dependency which hinders the maturation and growth of indigenous churches can be solved in this manner.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Harris, *Nothing but Christ*, 113.

<sup>9</sup> Yates, *Venn and Victorian Bishops abroad*, 134-35.



### 1.2.2 Self-propagation

The aim of Anderson and Venn's theory of self-propagation is to equip and enable national churches to evangelize indigenous people in their own ways. Indigenous pastors possess sufficient vitality that they can reproduce and extend through a region by their own efforts without foreign help. Indigenous ministers understand their own peoples' culture, and now best how to approach their own people. This circumstance creates inspiration of indigenous believers to established a church and evangelize other people, and in turn, these people would establish another pioneering church. It is self-extension and expansion. Since missionaries are always moving to reach out, they are expected to provide capacity development and training nationals to evangelize their people. Hiebert pointed out the weakness of early missionary focusing only on planting church. They had no vision for papering local ministers for evangelizing their own people and sending missionary to other cultures. Although they were poor they had their own ways to evangelize their own people and had more understanding of the culture of their own people<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, the task of original missionary agency was to develop the national Christians' capacity to enable them to be involved in evangelism and mission work.

### 1.2.3 Self-governing

It is self-management of the church without interference of foreign missionaries. The aim of Rufus Anderson was to raise up indigenous churches in order to set them free from kind of colonial dependence on Western imperialism. Indigenous churches are led, pastored, and supervised by nationals. Thus, the church management totally should be turned to national leadership. Church and missionary societies should avoid direct political participation of western colonialist states. Anderson opposed missionaries' both functional and a structural relationship to imperialism and colonialism in the expansion of western rule. They depended due to life protection to carry on their task safely. He rather suggested that religious institutions should be guided by religious principles in order to heal and rehabilitate of corrupted and exploited lives of the oppressed.<sup>11</sup> According to Venn's theory, self-governing of indigenous church is not to remove away Europeans and making enmity with them, rather creating environment of working together in true brotherhood and basis of genuine equality. It is the way of fraternal co-operation rather than of superintendence. The aim of self-governing is to remove dependency syndrome,

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<sup>10</sup> Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 194.

<sup>11</sup> Harris, *Nothing but Christ*, 112-13.

and to cease fully relying on foreign fund. As long as funding. As long funding comes from abroad it is obligatory for a donor to control and to know its use, hence, self-governing is unthinkable. Instead the indigenous should develop financial self-support. Venn pushed indigenous church to a greater independence or to be more precise to push the missionaries to permit a greater independence. Self-governing of indigenous people to be themselves and to maintain their national character, not eradicate it in the name of civilization. Self-government and self-support go together. Comprehensively, he had similar aspirations to wards self-extension, self-governing, self-support. He opposed the intermingling of Christianity and civilization.<sup>12</sup>

The first step of developing self-governing strategy is to provide training and capacity development, whereby they will be able to shoulder their churches' burden of responsibility. Developing human resource is the most significant opportunity to end the dependency syndrome on foreign support. The goal of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson was to encourage European missionaries to provide capacity development and training for enabling indigenous Christians to take up various responsibilities of the missionary endeavor, ordain indigenous people, give them great hierarchal responsibilities and authority and ensure the capability of local church to support itself and carry out its task without foreign support. However, through Henry Venn's strong effort and encouragement, Samuel Crowther in 1864 became the first African bishop on the Niger.<sup>13</sup> Both theologians made tireless effort to localize the African and Asian church ministers and church polity to the extent that they have become a place to feel at home. They did this by providing enough local resources to support their churches' work by giving themselves willingly to give full support.

#### 1.2.4 Self-theologizing

The idea of self-theologizing was invented by the anthropologist Paul Hiebert in order to include the notion that an indigenous church would communicate Christianity effectively in its own cultural context. By this he meant the ability of an indigenous church to read and interpret scripture within its local culture. This does not mean to produce self-centeredness or absolute

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<sup>12</sup> Williams, *The Ideal of the Self-Governing Church*, 23-5.

autonomy, but rather responsibility and maturity. However, the national churches had no need to remain dependent on outsiders. Self-theologizing does not mean to be isolated from the global body of Christ. Membership of the global body of Christ is an interdependent relation.<sup>14</sup> As Dr. Eide describes by quoting Rev Guddinna's expression of self-theologizing,

*An indigenous theology in the Ethiopian context may be defined as a translation of the Bible sources... to the patterns of the thought of our people that they may feel at home with Gospel of love. Theology must grow out of concrete daily experiences from our situation, in our cultural setting, in our economic life, in our political experience and in human life.*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hiebert, *Anthropological Insight for Missionaries*, 196-67.

<sup>15</sup> Eide, *Revolutionary & Religion in Ethiopia*, 2000:118-19.

## Chapter Two

### 2. THE ETHIOPIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH MEKANE YESUS - CENTRAL GIBE SYNOD (EECMY CGS) – BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW.

#### 2.1. Brief Historical development of the situation in EECMY regarding self-reliance.

Ethiopia is a country with diverse cultures, ethnic groups, traditions, languages and religions.

According to Ethiopian legends Christianity was introduced in Ethiopia during the apostolic period. This assumption is based on Acts 8:26-39 which depicts the Ethiopian eunuch as the first Gentile convert. I leave the dispute due to the geographical area covered by the Ethiopia Empire in the ancient times. Thus, the history of Christianity was silent until the fourth century. Christianity was introduced in Ethiopia in 330 A.D during the reign of Ezana. From somewhere in the Red Sea, two young Syrian Christian brothers named, Frumentius and Edesius on voyage from Tyre to India were taken as slaves to the a city of Aksum, which is present- day northern part of Ethiopia. They served the king and were given a high level of responsibilities. They advanced to become popular and important elite persons at the royal court serving as tutors to Aksum prince Ezana. Through their vital service of teaching, the ruler favored them. Frumentius (Abba Salama Kassate Berhan) was ordained in Egypt by Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, and sent back to Ethiopia. Then Christianity was introduced to the rulers and soon became the official state religion.<sup>16</sup> After this, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church spread into the various regions of the country. It was the largest and biggest church with a supreme position as a state religion throughout the centuries up to 1974 until the separation of state and Church announced by the Marxist Revolutionary government. The equality of all religions was officially decreed and the supremacy of Orthodox Church was weakened.<sup>17</sup>

The founding of evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia was the result of efforts by the western missionaries. The first Lutheran missionary to Ethiopia, a German Lutheran called Peter Heyling, who came to Ethiopia in the early 1635, with the intention of renewal the already existing Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The first point of his strategy was to translate the Bible into

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<sup>16</sup> Andersen, *A brief history of the Mekane Yesus Church*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 1996:139.

Amharic, and secondly to teach children from the upper classes evangelical Christianity. In addition, he had been practising medicine as a physician. His skill as a physician soon won him fame, and friendship with the Orthodox bishop and with the emperor as well.<sup>18</sup> His renewal movement inside the Ethiopian Orthodox Church paved the way for protestant missionary enterprises in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. His renewal movement inside the Ethiopian Orthodox Church paved the way for protestant missionary enterprises in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Heyling left Ethiopia in 1652 with due permission from the emperor for a vacation. Somehow, he could not achieve significant evangelism work due to strong resistance from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. But an important result of his work was the translation of the gospel to Amharic.<sup>19</sup>

About 200 years later, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) was the first evangelical organization to begin work in Ethiopia. The first messengers of this society, Samuel Gobat and Christian Kulger, came to Ethiopia in 1830 at the period of Zemene Mesafint or the era of the prince Ezana. Their aim was not to establish a new church, but to renew and reform the existing old Orthodox Church through instruction in and dissemination of the scriptures in the vernaculars. The attempt however, failed. The attempt was encountered strong resist from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The church was more interested in preserving its own identity and heritage.<sup>20</sup>

Though evangelical Christian missionaries were not allowed to go into the interior of Ethiopia, they were training indigenous people who were ransomed slave trade at the border in the Eritrea. From there they were able to send the indigenous evangelists to reach their people. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, indigenous Christians began to proclaim the Gospel. When the country opened her door to western missionaries different Lutheran Missions from Europe and America could come and start evangelistic work in different parts of the country. In the beginning indigenous evangelists played a great role in the evangelistic work. From 1898-1926 the indigenous evangelist pioneers travelled to Oromo land through difficult situation to preach the Gospel. Oneesimos Nasib had a strong desire to go to his people to preach the gospel to them.<sup>21</sup> He was pleading with God in prayer to reach his people, but failed due to unfavorable political

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<sup>18</sup> Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia*, 35-6.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/ethiopian-case-study.html> 18.05.2010

<sup>20</sup> Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia*, 54-63.

<sup>21</sup> Oneesimos Nasib, *an Ethiopian man, who kidnapped and sold into slavery, and was set free*.

circumstances. He began translation of the Bible and different spiritual books; the Bible was printed in Switzerland 1899. He was the first who translated books into Oromo language, and through his translation and indigenous local preaching a basis was laid for an Oromo theology. He played a great role in making the Bible understandable and adoptable in Oromo culture.<sup>22</sup> This paved the way for Oromo people to be converted to Protestant Christianity. After he completed the Bible translation, he was very eager to reach Oromo people with the gospel, but due to the unfavorable circumstances he was not able until 1904.<sup>23</sup>

Gebre-Ewostateos and Gumesh Wolde-Mikael, Gebre-Egziabher 1998 arrived at Jimma. Niguse Tashu who had already arrived at Jimma earlier received them. Later Daniel Dabala reached Jimma. But they were not able to fulfill their mission. Gebre-Ewostateos and Daniel Dabala proceeded to Wallaga to proclaim the gospel to the Oromo people.

Gebre-Ewostateos Ze-Mikael and Daniel Dabala had successfully launched the proclamation of the gospel as evangelical pioneer in Boji Karkaro which was the administrative centre of a populous district on the trade route to Kurmuk in Sudan, which came under British colonial rule. Fitawrari Dibaba Bakare, who lived at Boji Karkaro, enjoyed great prestige as a valiant warrior and wise counselor, whose prudence had saved Leqa Naqamte from destruction and Amara conquest in 1881.<sup>24</sup> He, was autonomous within his district through responsibility to the governor, his nephew Gebre-Egziabher Moroda. Gebre-Ewostateos Ze-Mikael met Fitawrari Dibaba Bakare, while he was looking for priest who could serve in St. Mary Church at Boji. At the same time Gebre-Ewostateos was looking for a job. Gebre-Ewostateos Ze-Mikael got the opportunity of being employed as the secretary of Fitawrari Dibaba Bakare, and priest at St. Mary's Church in Boji. Fitawrari Dibaba was the governor of Boji. This opportunity created favorable circumstance to proclaim the gospel at Boji and the entire area. He was able to influence the governor and the people through the gospel. He extensively preached the gospel in the villages and markets.<sup>25</sup> The indigenous evangelists made tireless efforts to proclaim the gospel to their people.

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<sup>22</sup> Aren, 385.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 419.

<sup>24</sup> Fitawrari: *A traditional Ethiopian title given to the minister of defense.*

<sup>25</sup> Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia*, 395.97.

The pioneer evangelical Christians in the western part had established contact before the arrival of western missionaries. The leaders were gathered for a conference at Naqamte in 1907 to discuss a common policy. After a discussion of the difficulties that they had met at their various places, they resolved to continue with their evangelism without hesitation (Aren 1978: 431-432). These early contacts among the evangelical Christians continued and in 1944 more formal conferences, where minutes were taken, started to be arranged for closer organizational fellowship between evangelical groups. Dr. Erik Söderström reported the joy of a Conference of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches that took place in December 1944 arranged by the indigenous people. Several meetings were held and the constitution and doctrinal statement of the church was drafted and discussed.<sup>26</sup> This vigorous and committed testimony of the indigenous evangelists paved the way for the western missionaries to reach Ethiopian people with the gospel. Here, indigenous people played a great role in self-propagating earnestly to preach the gospel to their people. In my point of view, the initial vision and inspiration of the Western missionaries was a core value. The Swedish missionaries who arrived in Eritrea in 1866 were not able to proceed through Ethiopia. Since they were not able to go into the interior of the country, while they were waiting for the opportunity of opening the door to enter into the country, they were training the indigenous people and sending them to fulfill their mission. It was the result of this training that the indigenous people were able to proclaim the gospel. Thus, their commitment and obedience to the great commission of the Lord Jesus should be considered as the most important for the founding evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mission organizations from Europe and North America began proclaiming the gospel in the various parts of Ethiopia:

- The Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM), with a vision to reach the Oromo people with the gospel could not access the Oromo people due to the difficult political situation that prevailed in the Horn of Africa. Hence, it was forced to stay at the Red Sea in Eritrea for about forty years before it could proceed to Addis Ababa in 1904.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/ethiopian-case-study.html> 18.05.2010

- The German Hermannsburg Mission (HM), currently called the Evangelical Lutheran Mission, also with a vision to reach the Oromo people with the gospel, began to send its first missionaries to the Oromo as early as 1926. The mission work could not readily fulfill its vision for the same reason as described above under Swedish Evangelical Mission. Its vision was fulfilled seventy years later, when its first group of missionaries arrived in Addis Ababa in 1927.
- The Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM), with its vision to reach the Sidama people and along with the other groups in the south part of Ethiopia, began its work in 1949 in the Sidama, Gamo Gofa and the Bale provinces.
- The Presbyterian Mission began its work in the Western part of Ethiopia in 1919, with a vision to reach the peoples of the south western parts of Ethiopia and the Oromo people. The first pioneer missionary, Dr. Thomas Lambie, was invited by a dignitary of the Imperial government, Ras Biru Wolde Gabriel, who was the governor of the Qelem district in the western part of Ethiopia. Dr. Lambie was invited by the governor to his district to treat the soldiers of the government who were suffering from a virulent influenza epidemic called the November illness (in Amharic Hidar Bashita), which affected the lives of many Ethiopians.
- The Danish Evangelical Mission, with a vision to reach the peoples of South Eastern part of Ethiopia, with the gospel, began its work in Bale in 1948.
- The American Lutheran Mission, with a vision to reach the peoples of the northern parts of Ethiopia, began its work in Wollo, Gonder and Tigray in 1958.
- Norwegian Mission Society (NMS), with a vision to reach the Gumuz people in Blue Nile basin, as well as the Oromo people living along the border of Sudan 1971.<sup>27</sup>

So, how did these missionaries begin and organize their work? We will discuss in the following sections some perspectives on the aim and methods of their work in its initial phase.

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<sup>27</sup> Megerssa Guta, *EECMY's 50 years Journey in Fulfillment of God's Mission: 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee the Establishment of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus*, 1-3.



As I have tried to mention earlier, the initial intention of protestant missionaries was to contribute to the renewal of the Orthodox Church and to spread the gospel amongst the non-Christian population, not to establishing a new church. But the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was more focused in preserving its own identity and heritage than responding to new opportunities or even preventing the expatriate missionaries from working. Thus, they were forced to begin their work independently with permission from the Imperial government. They established their offices in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, and sub-offices in other provinces at the major cities where they operated. Then the situation of the people they tried to get in contact with in the cities and eventually in the rural areas was deplorable. The economic situation, the health services, the educational background and many other domestic services such as potable water, electricity and, decent housing, were lacking. As Dr. Gutav Aren describes it, “when Rev. Karl Cederqvist, the first missionary who arrived Addis Ababa in 1904, the habitants were estimated at some fifty thousand. Most of them lived in circular huts with thatched roofs hedged by cactuses, shrubs and thorny bushes”. Therefore, it is possible to say that the missionaries conceived the spiritual and temporal life situation of the people as the most difficult issue, and one that needed most assistance. It was against this background that the missionaries began to proclaim the gospel to the people whereby the first generation of evangelical Christians, like Onesimos Nasib and others were won to the Lord Jesus Christ and began to co-operate with missionaries in proclaiming the gospel. In addition, the missionaries began almost instantly to think of new development and social service to alleviate multifaceted problems of the people. It seems fair to assume that the Ethiopian government was always more interested in contributions to the social needs of Ethiopia than in the spread of evangelical Christianity in the country. Therefore, the Emperor Teferi encouraged Western evangelical missions to promote education and health by the improvement of their schools and hospitals.<sup>28</sup> School books and Bibles were printed in Amharic and sold to the government schools in the province. Literature work was also an important instrument as part of the outreach to extend the gospel message far wide. Hence, missionaries built clinics and hospitals in the western and southern parts of Ethiopia to treat the people who were suffering from various diseases.<sup>29</sup> They built schools for the local people, particularly youngsters, in order to teach them how to read and write. For this reason, the legacy

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<sup>28</sup> *Interview with Megerssa Guta, 28.07.2009.*

<sup>29</sup> Andersen, *A Brief History of the Mekane Yesus Church*, 24-6.

of the missionary era consisted proclamation of the gospel and of the development efforts. The social services and development assistance was given to all people irrespective of sex, religion, and ethnic origin. In the initial stages, services in the clinics were given either for minimum pay or free of charge, even to those who were able to afford such help. The missionaries subsidized the medical cost with the funds provided by the respective mission organizations back home. The medical personnel, like dressers and other clinic workers, were being employed and paid by the missionaries. Regarding education, the school fees were kept low since many of the students came from poor families. Thus, missionaries subsidized running cost and the teachers were employed and paid by them.<sup>30</sup>

The Lutheran missions began to organize and reinforce their mission work by establishing a joint committee. The joint meetings of Lutheran missionary organizations in Ethiopia were held frequently, beginning in 1943. The establishment of a joint committee in 1951 led to common initiatives for pastors' training and organizing of church work. From 1954, the mission organizations also worked with local congregations to establish a united Lutheran church in Ethiopia, with encouragement of the Lutheran World Federation.

From these joint efforts, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) has become an indigenous a national Church which grew up from the work of the Lutheran missionaries and indigenous evangelists from 1866 onwards. It was established as a national church in 1959 with about 20,000 baptized members. At present structurally the EECMY is divided into 21 synods, joint programs, and two operational areas with a potential to grow to a synod level in the near future. The synods are self-governed entities. Indigenous people carry out the leadership and responsibility of propagation at all levels. But when it comes to funding it was not easy to bring the church away from dependency. Currently the church has approximately 5,300,000 baptized members.<sup>31</sup> As Mr. Emmanuel Abraham the former EECMY president (1963-1985) said, when the Church was established, the national leaders took over leadership, but the economic part was not considered. Some of us were non-salaried ministers, only a few ministers received a salary from missionaries. For example, since I was a government employee, I was a non-salaried minister. Some of us have served the church without salary. The issue of

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<sup>30</sup> *Interviewing with Megerssa Guta, 28.07.2009.*

<sup>31</sup> *Interview with Megerssa Guta, 28.07.2009.*

economic self-support was silent for almost 20 years. So, when there is no financial resource, it is obvious that the church would constantly look to outsiders for financial support. Even though the leadership of the church was handed over to the indigenous people, economically they were not able to be independent. It was obligatory to us to continue to approach the co-operating mission partners for financial assistance.

The schools, clinics, hospitals, literacy schools and other necessary expenses were fully covered by funding from abroad. Of course, they were telling us economically to be self-reliant; as long as the church's evangelism, social service and development work were fully financed by the missionaries, it was not easy to be moved away from outsiders' financial dependency. More or less, this trend has continued until now.<sup>32</sup>

The newly born church began to undertake the responsibility of propagating the gospel and running the structure or administration by her own indigenous leaders. As to the funding of the structure, the four synods that formed the EECMY, i.e., the Western Synod, the South Synod, the Central Synod and Wollo-Tigray Synod, were requested by the first Executive Committee of the church, which met in Addis Ababa on January 17, 1960 to assist in funding the running costs of the central office for the fiscal years 1959 and 1960. It was decided that the Treasurer of the church divide the amount that the synods could pay according to their capacity, and notify them (Res.No 3/60 and 4/60). This decision was approved by the 4<sup>th</sup> EECMY General Assembly that met in the Yirgalem-Sidamo province in 1965. The decision was not fully implemented as desired, due to the major following reasons:

- From the very beginning the extensive work of awareness building of the economic self-reliance of the church among the church members was not done on time i.e. the proclamation of the gospel was not initially announced in the ways that would awake Christians to support their church according to their capacity.
- The financial dependency caused by the country's impoverishment was a major obstacle to develop income resources for the church. These circumstances forced the church constantly to look to cooperative mission partners for financial assistance.

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Emmanuel Abraham, 15.07.2009.

- The structures and traditional approaching to financing the volume of the church work carried on and increased as the result of growth in membership could not cover all the necessary expenses.<sup>33</sup>

After the establishment of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) and the registration of the church with the Imperial Government, the integration policy was signed between the EECMY and Co-operating Mission organizations at the Imperial High Court on April 7, 1969. One of the main issues defined in the agreement was that the financial assistance the mission organizations were to give to the EECMY should have no time limit. This led the EECMY to depend heavily on foreign funding for several decades.

As it is mentioned above, the church still grew by leaps and bound year after year. In contrast, the block grant or abroad funding was reduced from year to year, irrespective of the agreement made. The church was facing acute financial constraints to running her work appropriately. Self-governing and self-propagation were not interconnected with financial self-reliance, due to the financial dependency on foreign support. Hence, it is fair to say that it was not a fully self-governing church.

Then the matter of financial self-reliance became the urgent need of the church leaders. In 1972 the issue of the development of large institutions was raised by the church leaders and between representatives of the Lutheran World Federations. The concern of the EECMY leaders was brought to the EECMY Committee meeting in December 1974. The committee decided to hand over the big institutions to the concerned body of the government. Furthermore, the declaration of the Ethiopian revolutionary government on the economic policy of the country on 7 February 1975 which stated that the government itself was to provide education and health for the people more forced the church to transfer the big development institutions. The Rev. Gudinaa was the first to realize the essential features of the Ethiopian revolution. Throughout the whole period 1974-79 he stood out as the driving spiritual and intellectual force behind the changes attempted by the church to meet the challenge of the Ethiopian Revolution. His Pastoral Letter of March 1975 is as such an example of social-ethical reflection of considerable relevance. The "Memorandum" August of 1975 is more in line with pastoral theological reflection on how to

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<sup>33</sup> *From the Minutes of the first Executive Committee, as quoted by Megerssa Guta in "EECMY 50 years" January 2009, 31.*

translate holistic theology into what was called a "functional approach" to development and nation building. By functional approach it meant to base its development strategy on the resources available among the people and not on foreign funds.<sup>34</sup> Thus, in 1972 the letter of EECMY interpreted within the social and political reality of Ethiopia, the letter contains theological statements of considerable relevance.

The essence of the letter can be described in the following five points: 1) An integral human development, where spiritual and material needs are seen together, is only the right approach to development. 2) The division between witness and service is harmful to the church and will ultimately result in distorted Christianity. 3) The development of inner person is a prerequisite for a healthy and lasting development of society. 4) The cooperating agencies ought to review their criteria for allocation of assistance. The letters reflected real problems experienced by EECMY.<sup>35</sup>

From 1972-1979 successively the seminars, workshops, and different awakening papers were presented on the self-reliance.

In the EECMY moratorium was raised as the strategy to achieve self-reliance. Dr. Eide further states that “the Moratorium issue was raised in public for the first time, within the EECMY with any substantial support, during the seminars on Christianity and Socialism. The question of a moratorium was raised over and again by many people. It was openly discussed and favored and there seems to be a little doubt that some form of moratorium had the support of the majority of seminarians and many others. The missionary community, on its side, felt that an enforced moratorium could come one day”<sup>36</sup>.

Rev. Gudina, however, stated that in his opinion “Moratorium is in the first place a theological issue (emphasis added) and not that one’s specific economic situation should not be allowed to overrule theological conviction.” He further emphatically states his position as follows:

Understanding that the position of the church was clear quit as regards the relationship with missionary personnel as well as other personnel connected with evangelistic outreach and based

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<sup>34</sup> [http://www.dacb.org/stories/ethiopia/gudina\\_tumsa.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/ethiopia/gudina_tumsa.html) 27.04.2009.

<sup>35</sup> Eide. *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 2000: 68-9.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 124.

on my own theology reflections, I have spoken against moratorium whenever opportunity offered contending that theological basis. He, however, has not bluntly objected to moratorium and the effort that's that have to be made by churches to strive toward self-reliance. He asserted that self-reliance was the final goal of any church.<sup>37</sup>

Moratorium is the temporary withdrawal of resources and expatriate personal in order to give the EECMY time to find its identity as it makes efforts to depend on its own personnel and finance thereby attaining self-reliance.

The 35<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee's response and decision to the moratorium presentation of the General Secretary was:

The economic situation of the EECMY is part and parcel of the church economic situation of Ethiopia. And the situation of the country's economy and its economic policy were bound to affect the church. Thus, the church must therefore make sacrificial efforts to achieve self-reliance, but withdrawal of foreign personnel and resources were rejected by the Committee.<sup>38</sup>

The weak structural communication between synod and congregation also created a dependency syndrome. Such weak communication is created when there is no deciding together, working together, growing together.

*In former times the congregations managed themselves. They called young men from their midst and sent them for theological training. The congregations cared for their student and for their pastors. They collected money and paid the pastor's salary. The big congregation collected enough for the president's salary. When the synod was organized the way it is today, the pastors were hired by the synod and the congregation did not feel the same responsibility as before. Their pastors were sent by the synod. The synod paid their salaries whether they worked or not. When the persecution came the pastors were imprisoned, the congregations did not struggle to get them out. The way the candidates are selected and the way the big bureaucratic synod is organized revealed a critical weakness during the crisis, the result being that the congregations to a large extent were left without Word and Sacrament. In addition, many of the pastors lived outside the congregations, sometimes quite far away.<sup>39</sup>*

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<sup>37</sup> Megerssa Guta, "Between Dependency and Self-Reliance: The legacy of the Rev. Gudina Tumsa and the Challenge of Self-Reliance", 10.

<sup>38</sup> The 35<sup>th</sup> EECMY's Executive Committee resolution no, 35-26.75.

<sup>39</sup> Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 2000: 223-24

Hence, due to the gap between synod and congregations the decisions of self-reliance was not implemented as planned by the church leaders. Therefore, the following circumstances were considered as the obstacles of self-reliance development.

- The decisions of the church at different committees and stewardship teaching of the church on the issue of self-reliance did not extend to the grassroots or congregation level. So, some synods' congregations were not aware of giving. Their minister were either poorly paid or not paid.
- Some congregations were not willing on committed to fund their synods.
- Some congregations ministers were not cared for by synod or congregations. This hampered them to serve their congregation diligently.

To my understanding the organization structure of the church when it is embraced and supported by the congregations, makes it easy to implement self-reliance. Because the structure of the church when there is no living together, working together, deciding together, and growing together, it weakens the growth and the unity of the church. But when there is unity, working together, deciding together, it is a real and healthy unity, which enhances growth of the church in many aspects. As it was mentioned earlier the Idjaji parish congregations during the critical time, when many private and public properties were looted by thieves, guarded the church prosperities. In addition, the congregations provided in cash and in kind to the parish office workers, congregations pastors and evangelists. Because the Bank Ethiopia was not functioning in that transitional time of political instability due to the overthrowing of the communist government and the coming of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) to the power. Thus, the congregations cared for both the parish and congregations' ministers in providing their food expenses in cash and in kind. In so doing a sense of trust developed between parish and congregations. The synod was at the distance about 120km, so it was not easy to reach the parish at that critical time. Therefore, when the structures are not supported by the congregations there is no sustainable growth. Thus, the structural and numerical development without equal consideration of economy and other resources development can not result in sustainable development. If local economy and capacity cannot grow along with rapid structural and numerical development of the church then long term dependency is inevitable. Hence, this

move towards economic self-reliance forced the church to take drastic measures to avoid her work being adversely affected, as described in the following sections.

The 9th General Assembly at Nejo, Wollagga- in the Western part of Ethiopia, passed a policy decision on self-reliance in 1976. The decision had the goal of the church being fully self-reliant through all her structures by 1996. However, it was not implemented as desired due to the adverse situation that the church passed through during the repressive socialist government of Ethiopia which was strongly anti-religious. This does not mean that the church lost her vision of being self-reliant. The congregations were self-reliant from the outset and supporting their parishes and synods with small contributions.<sup>40</sup>

#### Policy decisions at General Assemblies regarding self-reliance

##### The 12th General Assembly 1984

The great drought of 1984 was a great challenge to the General Assembly, but encouraged the synods not to lose the sight of the policy of self-reliance, and therefore, the teaching on stewardship should be strengthened in parishes, districts and synods.<sup>41</sup>

##### The 13th General Assembly 1989

The General Assembly reaffirmed the decision of the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly the police of self-reliance.

##### 14th General Assembly

After the fall of the Ethiopian Revolutionary government (Derg) and the coming to power of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) The Assembly clearly stated that the EECMY has not attained self-reliance as decided during earlier Assemblies, even though it has been high on the agenda of the General Assembly, the Council, and the Executive Committee for many years. As it was pointed out the main factor was the political situation of the country. The Assembly designed the new strategy of strengthening of self-reliance; it was to

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<sup>40</sup> Eide, *Revolutionary & Religion in Ethiopia, 2000*: 70,117-20,122-25.

<sup>41</sup> GA Memo 16-21 January 1984.



participate in the investment plan in order to generate income. The decision was referred to 88<sup>th</sup> EC to implement it.<sup>42</sup>

#### The 15th General Assembly 1997

The main issue was how to integrate the structure of the church with the goal of self-reliance. Therefore, the resolution was:

That a sufficient study be made of the structures of the church, and that whenever improvements need to be made in regard to the goal of self-reliance, that these improvements be made before the budget is allocated to them.<sup>43</sup>

#### The 16th General Assembly 2001

It stated that self-reliance, even though it was difficult to run on the present structures of the church by own budget, was continued. Self-reliance has to be practiced by workers and leaders. Opportunities to invest towards self-reliance had to be based on the capacity according to the nature of the areas. So far seven General Assemblies have been held since the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 1976. The policy decisions were continuously given by the Assembly and further directives given for implantation by the Executive Committee (EC).<sup>44</sup> To my observation it was not implemented due to the lack of follow-up and commitment of the units of the church to the policy decisions. The inherited dependency syndrome, relying on abroad funding, was not easily broken.

#### From 2005 onwards

The EECMY fully embarked on the self-reliance issue with new policy directives given by the 17<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in January 2005. The decision given was that each congregation should give 40% of its annual income to the parish. The parish in turn should share with the synod office what it obtained from the congregations. In turn, the synod office should retain its share and give 10% to the national church's central office (GA-18-41-2009" '6")

The 18<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, which met in Addis Ababa in January 2009, revised the decision given at the 17<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, that each congregation should give 10% of its annual income

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<sup>42</sup> GA Memo 25-30 January 1993

<sup>43</sup> GA memo 20-25 January 1997.

<sup>44</sup> GA Memo 21-27 January 2001

to the synod. Thus, the synod should share with the national Central Office 10 % of its income from the congregations (GA-18-41-2009" '7")

Even though the issue of economic self-reliance has always been at the top of the agenda of the EECMY's meetings, she has so far not fully reached the desired goal, due to the following reasons:

- The heavily financial dependency caused by the country's impoverishment.
- Unfavorable policy of the communist government from 1974-1991.
- The successive change of governments often accompanied with devastating wars and conflicts.
- Drought, famine and epidemic diseases and inadequate financial management systems.

Despite the unfavorable situation mentioned above, the church has never abandoned her vision of being self-reliant. All the church units were encouraged to look for ways and means to re-enforce the implementation of self-reliance. Step by step many congregations of EECMY have attained the aim of being fully self-reliant. Some synods of the church are to some extent being financed by their respective local congregations. Hence, a sense of self-confidence is growing substantially, accompanying the extensive work of awareness building among the leaders and members of the church at various levels.

Particularly, the newly born Central Gibe Synod is a fully self-reliant unit. The synod is able to run its work by its own local resources. The practise of self-reliance of this synod will be discussed extensively in the proceeding chapter. Therefore, the efforts of self-reliance implemented so far are encouraging. So, the future of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in terms of economic self-reliance looks bright, but not without a price.

## **Chapter Three**

### **3. HISTORICAL FOCUS OF THE PAST (1973-1990)**

As earlier described due to the financial dependency, the preaching of the Gospel was considered as the mandate of the missionaries that was coined with medical and other development activities. This kind of understanding that the responsibility to evangelize was only up to the missionaries had left a scar in the mind of the indigenous peoples' enthusiasm not take over of the evangelism work with full local capacities in all areas. As the historical fact that left its impact up on the indigenous evangelism work a lot of factors contributed and left its challenges. Among many factors the following are worthy to be mentioned. These were: lack of awareness, the instability of political situation of the country, natural disaster, economical limitations and the tendency to depend upon the foreign fund and made it difficult to convince people in order to develop the culture of self reliance for the whole work of the Synod. Thus, in this chapter I will briefly discuss the historical focuses of the past which were obstacles of developing economic self-support in the following sections:

#### **3.1 Lack of awareness**

The early missionaries and indigenous preachers mainly focused on preaching the good news and converting people to Christianity by providing material needs as well. Hence, the deplorable situation of the people, did not allow the first missionaries to focus on the awareness building of economic self-support. Some people were converted to Christianity as long as they were getting some material benefits from the church. Because of this Protestantism was considered as the religion of wheat by the adherents of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and later on by the communist leaders of the country. Furthermore, leaders and elders or voluntary preachers were even motivated by incentives to 'go out with the Gospel to those in the darkness'. This notion towards the concept of evangelism planted in the mind and hearts of the people to depend upon foreign support came to be the tradition or culture for the church. Once tradition or culture was built in the mind of the society or the people it would not be so easy to enlighten and lead the people to a new way of economic self-support for the evangelism work. Therefore, the concept of dependency syndrome became a kind of blessed norm to live with it. In another way there was no in-depth teaching on the concept of self reliance. This shortage of in-depth knowledge and

teaching resulted in the lack of well trained, dedicated, and committed ministers and members of the church in the area.

In connection to this Rev. Diba Abetu as described; says: the support from the overseas did not inspire and encourage the congregations economically to be self-reliant, because there was no planned awareness raising activities in their methods of rendering services. Another factor that contributed to the lack of awareness was the existing weak structural and communication system between congregations, parishes, and the synod. The structural functions of the synod created certain gaps between congregations, parishes and the synod.<sup>45</sup> This eventually created a lack of mutual understanding and receiving one another as far as the congregations were in need of ministers who worked and nurtured them by living among them.

### 3.2 Economic limitation

Self-support becomes a larger challenge, particularly in the third world and developing nations. Due to circumstances and not choice, poverty put huge economic limitations on the people. The EECMY national church leaders were gifted to develop structure and ministry program, but they lacked access to financial resources. Besides, from 1974-1991 the Derg (Military Junta) was actively engaged in eliminating private economic activity. Private ownership was legally prohibited, and entrepreneurship openly discouraged. Its policies continued a major shock and reduced economic activity in the private sector. Peasants, moreover, were forced to deliver a specified amount of grain as their quota of their produce at fixed prices to the government marketing board, the Agricultural Marketing Cooperation (AMC) via their respective service cooperatives.<sup>46</sup> This heavily affected the economy of the country and church economy likewise. Therefore, evangelism and other works of the church and the financial dependency of the Central Gibe Synod were hampered due to this critical problem of the country. However, the church in that difficulty circumstance did not give up its mission in the situation. Due to the Communist down fall after 1991 peace in the country was restored, the strategy and effort was continued.

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<sup>45</sup>Interview with Diba Abetu, 23.07.2009.

<sup>46</sup> Pausewang, *Ethiopia: Options for Rural Development*, 117.

### 3.3 Tendency of dependency syndrome

In reaction to the dependency upon foreign funding, Venn and Anderson pioneered the three selfs theory as remedial for the indigenous churches in order to bring out them from foreign economic dependency and to encourage and strengthen them to carry out evangelism work by their own local resources and indigenous ministers likewise. Venn as depicted earlier, the indigenous church work dependency up on abroad funding is as the scaffolding, which is not sustainable and supported and embraced by indigenous Christians. When construction is finished the scaffolding is removed. As long the missionary is not embraced and supported by the indigenous Christians, the work is unable to stand without support of foreign mission.

Dependency is called a syndrome or sickness. It is a greater difficulty than poverty. It was the disposition to think of themselves as naturally dependent upon others as surely as the creeper on its supporting tree or the child upon its parents. When churches were dependent, they developed a mentality of being poor, partly by not wishing to ask why they were poor. At the root of this syndrome there was an unhealthy dependence on foreign funding and, sometimes, foreign decision-making. But according to the Scripture, the church must be salt in the society that enables creatively to use its resources. The task of the church is to set free itself and others from a handicapped life.<sup>47</sup>

Dependency on external assistance would have a detrimental effect of the leaders of congregations, districts, the later national church and missionary societies. A flexible and more inward looking strategy and local development for economic and material self development would have been a guiding principle for sustainable church and church structure development.<sup>48</sup> From the very beginning due to the poor economic situation of the country the missionaries fully financed the local church buildings. The continuation of financial supporting for long-term gradually contributed to a dependency syndrome. The congregations were not aware of looking to inward resources. And pastors and evangelists were employed and paid by the synods and they were dependent on foreign funding. Sunday collections or offerings were given in the smallest coin of the Ethiopian currency, i.e. cents. Why did this happen? Teaching on tithing, giving to the treasury of God and being faithful stewards of God's resources were not main focus. The

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.wmausa.org/page.aspx?id=83819> 18.05.2010

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/pdf/1997/0102/jf976.htm> 02.11.2008

mentality that the white man provided the necessary funding prevailed in the congregations as well.<sup>49</sup> The structural and rapid numerical growth of the church which was not fully based on the local resources forced her to improve the awareness and empower her members through teaching of stewardship. The issue of the self-reliance became as crucial issue in the church.

Thus, continuously, from 1974- 2009, at the different the church's committee meetings: General Assembly, Executive Committee, council, Synods presidents consultations, church boarding meeting, and so on the issue of self-reliance was raised. But it was not implemented as it was expected, of course to some extent there was promising development.

Today the EECMY membership growth has approximately reached 5.3 million. The growth in number, geographical area coverage and reliable structure leading to the grass root is very remarkable. As a result of congregational outreach services new congregations organized parishes and synods were springing up manifesting further growth of the church. This also indicates that area coverage and numerical growth will continue in the future, but the economic self-supporting growth did not grow along in line with its numerical growth.

Mr. Debella Kenaa, the former Central Synod Development and Social Services Director and the current EECMY DASSC relief department coordinator said that; the early missionaries when they started their heroic missionary services in the country they used incentives as a means for entry and socialization. These incentives were used for both church planting and some social services institution formation and running. This was a wise means of entry to the then communities and societies in specific geographic areas and situations. But in the latter part of development forward looking vision were needed to scale down such incentives and commence participatory self help initiatives at congregation and coordination levels.<sup>50</sup>

Early missionaries did not also pay attention to the cultures and traditional ways of life relations. Sadly in the long run dependence on resources from the missionaries became the only source of money and manpower to lead congregations and to undertake outreach services. It was perhaps at this stage dependence was conceived, born and grown wide in the later stage together with the development of the EECMY as a national church.

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Megerssa Guta, 28.07.2009.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Debella Kanaa, 25, 07 2009.

Certainly, the problem of the EECMY was not lack of resources to support its ministry, but it was lack of commitment how to handle its existing God given resources, and lack of prioritizing the development of economic self-reliance along with self-propagating and self-governing.

Wealth and poverty seem to have very little to do with breaking, experiencing self-reliance, and creating indigenous missionary movement. This can be seen from the experiences of the Macedonians church. Paul noted that the Macedonia had a severe trial and extreme poverty, but they also had overflowing joy. Their great joy was not in having enough money and goods, but in spite of the fact they had very little, they gave more than what was reasonable. They gave sacrificially (2 Corinthians 8:1-3). Thus, financial dependence has less to do with wealth and poverty than with mentality of dependence that accompanied the spread of the gospel. We can see that the early Christian groups have practiced communal life and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to men, as every man had need (Acts 2:44-45;4:34-37).

One of the most commonly seen problem throughout the church structures was the continuous dependency on external support for both the spiritual and the development efforts that the church is undertaking at all levels. This problem is deep rooted and goes back to the initial start of the evangelical work in the country by the missionaries.

In regard to the Central Gibe Synod, due to the dependency on abroad fund, before 1998 the CGS congregations were not aware of giving their heart, strengths and resources. Surely, some hindrances such as drought, diseases and backwardness were considered as obstacles to self reliance. As it was mentioned above the main reason was being mentality poor in accepting the poverty as the normal life. So there was no alternative in order to be removed away from the situation they were living in, thus bringing any change would not be thought. But when the outreach budget totally blocked even without any notification, the congregations and parish had to struggle for existence. The blocking grant was a great shock, but it helped the indigenous church to see the local resources. This unexpected crisis brought another new vision and invention to carry on the Lord's ministry in a new chapter which has true blessing, namely to serve God's kingdom with local resources that show one's love to God as well as to one's fellow men.

### 3.4 An instability of political circumstance of the country

Economic growth and political stability are deeply interconnected. On the one hand, the uncertainty associated with an unstable political environment may reduce investment and speed of economic development. On the other hand poor economic performance may lead to government collapse and political unrest. Political unrest most of the time is influenced by inequality, while economic development is bound to affect income distribution. Thus, it is true to say that political instability has arisen out of economic instability.

In 1974 a military coup overthrew the monarchy government started a process of indoctrination with communism. Gradually the new dictator government in 1977 began persecuting evangelical Christians, starting from 1979 closing the churches, imprisoning and torturing the prominent leaders and active church members as well. It was a time of transition with a lot of shaking conditions in Ethiopia. Right at the beginning of its government the Ethiopian ideology was totally against existence of religion so the EECMY congregations were closed and the Church's resources were confiscated and the leaders were tortured and killed as a result of severe persecution all foreigners were forced to leave the country except a few of them. In connection to this Dr. Eide described the situation of the time as follows:

When self-reliance had been urged to practice, in 1976 the communist government imposed severe difficulties on the Church. Due to the severe and difficulty persecution, the EECMY-Synods' prominent leaders and ministers were imprisoned. More than 700 Congregations were closed and development projects had been taken over by local communist authorities. Three fourth of Church buildings and other properties had been confiscated missions reduced their staffs, the Church was almost at the brink of economic disaster. During that movement Central Synod of EECMY which is located in the Eastern part of Wollegga and the Western Shoa had been encountered severe difficulties. Out of 46 Congregations 32 were closed and a numbers of services were interrupted. EECMY- Central Synod Naqamte Hotel was confiscated. The work of the Central Synod was thus almost brought to a standstill.<sup>51</sup> Here it was tangible evidence that the instability of political circumstance of the country and anti-religious policy of the communist government has affected the CGS self-support effort.

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<sup>51</sup> EIDE, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 1996: 230-232.



### 3.5 Natural disasters

Ethiopia encountered not only instability of the political situation but also was struck by severe natural disaster especially during 1984—1989. The drought and famine have been a regular occurrence for centuries. The working assumption here is that while it is easy to blame nature, the problem at hand was as much man-made.

It should be clear from the outset that drought and other natural calamities do strike any part of the world. It is the policy of the governments that lessen their impacts. Drought does not translate itself directly to famine if the people have enough reserves, and if distribution of resources including food materials is fair. But that was not the case with the consecutive Ethiopian regimes who had been cared for their maintenance of power than for people. These regimes brought famine conditions to the people due to their political instability. For example, Menelik was preoccupied with his expansionary war to the south when a Great Famine struck in 1896. According to imperial chronicles, the situation was so bad that, in those days, some form of cannibalism was practiced. Haile Selassie had a badly reported fight in his hands with Ogaden and Eritrea when 200,000 people perished in 1973/74.<sup>52</sup> The regime that was supported by the West did crumble by the combination of Western camera exposure and overbearing local dissent. The places that famine struck hard, including Wollo and Tigray were not the regime's favorite areas, as they were complicated by traditional feudal power rivalries. Unhealthy distribution of resources, mainly land and destructive exploitation of nature and people led to a situation where peasant farmers were in no position to resist any drought condition.

In other words, they lost their resilience to natural hazards. War worked to complicate matters. Traditionally northern warlords of Ethiopia thrived in the business of war and banditry which is only 'modernised' by imperial centralization. Here as elsewhere the first victims of banditry were peasants. So they were in 1973.

In 1984, the world media was again preoccupied with another round of gloom. Famine was back again. The military regime of Mengistu Hailemariam had one vision: build a "communist" empire. Revolution was what his regime proclaimed as it toppled the dying feudal autocracy. No

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 64.

one asked the cost, and no one cared to measure it. The slogan was to build 'it' at any cost. It did not matter if that cost was the loss numbering millions of lives, or dashed hopes and opportunities. The word 'building' seemed positive, but the actions were about destruction of humanity.

The 1984 famine came after a protracted war in different parts of the Ethiopian empire: war with Ogaden, war with Eritrea and Tigray, war with other oppressed nations, war within the establishment, and the red terror against opposition groups. Mengistu's atrocities did not end there. The villagisation and the resettlement programs which made everyone equally destitute. The villagisation program was a communist experiment in a terribly poor empire. The poverty that visited upon the rural families by ruthless policies, the environmental damage that the malicious resettlement programs engendered, and the ruthless execution of war which led to famine were openly described by the western journalists. They declared the place something nearer to hell on earth. For millions of people whose voices were crushed and repressed, the place has been a hell for nearly a century.<sup>53</sup>

It has been assumed a cyclical pattern with frequency of about ten years. The situation was described as most devastating of human life, domestic and wild animals too. Amongst affected areas the West Showa, Idjaji was highly affected. The Synod shared the grief and the anxieties of the area by providing food and cloth through overseas support for relief program. This occurrence was the major problem for the congregation to be dependent upon the foreign funding or donation, and finally became a challenge to change the attitude of the people of the Synod.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.oromia.org/Articles/SeyoumHamesso.htm> 13.03.2010

<sup>54</sup> Interview Debella Kanaa, 26.07.2009.

## Chapter Four

### 4. THE CENTRAL GIBE SYNOD

#### 4.1 Overview of the Central Gibe Synod

The Central Gibe Synod is located in the Oromiya region of the Western part of Ethiopia, West Shoa, and 215 km from Addis Ababa. Its topography is a mixture of high land, low land and with mixed temperature.

The name of Idjaji means stop, the term was used in the connotation of an order for looting, since the area was known by its robbers. The term was used by lawless persons and criminals. In ancient time when there was no vehicle, individuals traveled from Wollagga in the western part of Ethiopia to Addis Ababa through Idjaji. It is a small town located between Addis Ababa and Wollagga province. The robbers and thieves forced travelers to stop for looting, and were threats to the travelers and merchants. The local government had been making tireless efforts to stop the tragedy by punishing the culprits with imprisonment and death, but it was impossible to stop the crimes. In addition, the community was oppressed by land lords, witchdoctors and a corrupt administration.

As Mr. Kanaa Aboma, one the first founders of the Idjai parish, expressed; It was in such circumstance that the preaching of the gospel was begun in 1962 at the so called Idjaji Clinic Veranda by two lay persons.<sup>55</sup> These two lay men were transferred from the Wollegga province for clinic work. The clinic was a branch of Naqamte hospital which is the capital city East Wollagga province. The traditional and Orthodox religion followers opposed their preaching of the gospel, and forced them to stop, but it continued underground in a home cell. The founding of the Central Gibe Synod was based on the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Central Synod evangelistic work extension and expansion efforts. The first evangelist, who was sent by the Central Synod to Idjaji, was called Mr. Tesema Teshome in 1969, with the intention of re-enforcing the evangelistic work in the area already started by lay people. Although the initiated evangelistic work encountered by the strong resistance from Orthodox, the congregation of Idjaji was established in 1972 from a home cell. This, single congregation quickly multiplied into several congregations. Within one year time in 1973, the Idjaji Parish was

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<sup>55</sup> *Idjaji parish developed into the Central Gibe Synod in 2001, see on this thesis pg.43.*

established and organized, comprising five congregations with 1000 baptized members. The evangelistic work of the Idjaji parish was started by the Central Synod as the outreach of the Bako district.

Due to the geographical setup, the area was mostly attacked by malaria and other heavy equatorial diseases. The people were economically poor; socially disadvantaged groups. Thus, the life of the people was deplorable. The economic situation, the health services, the educational background and many others domestic services such as potable water, decent housing and etc were lacking. It was not easy to bring change in such terrible and difficult situation. However, the community needed help to come out of this situation. So the growing parish shouldered the responsibility of teaching, improving and helping the community. What was the major challenge to the parish to carry out holistic ministry? The oppressors (landlords, witchdoctors, and corrupt local governors) were more interested in preserving their oppressive system for their own advantage by keeping the poor down, thus they strongly opposed the gospel. The tenant farmers were being exploited by the landlords, and the sick people were exploited by the witchdoctors or qaalluus as well. The qaalluu was in the traditional interpretation a person who served as God's representative or mediator between man and God. According to the traditional understanding of sickness and misfortune were regarded as punishment by spirits or the work of evil forces. In question of misfortune or accident, the qallu would be consulted as the advisor or remedial of any misfortune. Through him people could find the cause of the misfortune, and ensure good luck. He would give advice how to get rid of any misfortune.<sup>56</sup> So, many patients very often used to go to the qaalluu for healing. Firstly, whenever the sick people go to the qaalluus for treatment of various illnesses, they were expected to pay money. The qaalluu would instruct the patients to offer sacrifice such as slaughtering sheep, bull, ox and etc. for the spirits who got angry with them, .i.e. healing came through sacrifice. But what would happen if the patients were not healed? Since, the witchdoctors did not endorse the use of medical assistance, the patients were forced to continue the offering of sacrifices to all the spirits who had been angry with them until they were healed. They spent their money in vain and finally many of them died without any medical treatment. As seen from the view of the Christians the work of the witchdoctor was a deceitful one. He enriched himself at the cost of sick people. Evangelical Christians claimed that

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<sup>56</sup> Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 1996: 54, 55, 90.

only Jesus Christ was the true representative of God. Most of the poor patients had also been borrowing money from the land Lords and local rich merchants at high rate of interest in order to provide sacrifice for the spirits. So, when not being able to pay back they were stuck in debt. This general life model created an impoverished area. “But the gospel of Jesus Christ is God’s power to save everyone who believes in it. It is the power to save from the power of the evils’ attack, eternal damnation, and from economic exploitation and political oppression without any payment”<sup>57</sup>. So, in this severe state of oppression, how did those who were weary, burdened and oppressed get the opportunity of healing through the gospel? Initially, in underground cell home step by step a few people got healing through prayer without any sacrifice or payment. This was a great surprise to many. To bear witness about Jesus’ healing was a major task of the new believers. Gradually, through miraculous healing and extensive witness by laymen and ministers, more and more people received Jesus. As the first evangelical Christians in this area saw it, the power of the gospel and the act of the Holy Spirit in liberating a number of patients from their sickness was the reason for the fast expansion of the numbers of believers. Still the resistance by land lords and witchdoctors continued without abatement. Through tribulation and persecution Christians went underground, meeting in cell groups and quietly evangelizing. Believers learned to demonstrate the power and love of Christ to share the gospel with those who showed interest. The enmity, killing, and hating one another was replaced by preaching and teaching of the gospel. Continual teaching, prayer, and preaching of the gospel, enabled the exploited people to develop and promote self-help.

Christianity revolutionized by breaking the yoke of the exploitation system of the oppressors through commitment and a suffering ministry. Furthermore, a literacy school program for children, and adults, as well as health training, went hand in hand with evangelism. The desperate conditions that faced the poor were looked up on as a call for a revolution in the parish’s attempts at solution. These problems could not be solved without a strong commitment and risky action with heroic faith. Thus, it was necessary in addition to the proclamation of the gospel, to render social services and development. The EECMY- Central Synod began literacy school since the number of the literate people was extremely low. Literacy was seen as the remedy and solution for this marginalized community. It aimed at empowering and creating a

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<sup>57</sup> Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia*, 1996: 119.

common understanding of life and improving the quality of their lives. Literacy was a remedy to create growth and better living conditions for individuals. Hence, the synod began preaching the gospel accompanied by an adult and children literacy program, building a school for children and medical clinic regardless of religion, sex, and race i.e. education and care for all.<sup>58</sup>

In 1984 a severe famine in the Idjaji area occurred due to ecological problems and unpredictable weather patterns creating drought, hunger, and starvation. As known, the economy of Ethiopia is based on agriculture. Hence, the incidence hampered the crop production and availability of food for human and livestock in the area. Thus, the drought had a direct negative impact on food production and the overall economy of the community. This tragedy caused the death of 2000 people, and about 45,000 people were seriously affected by the drought. An acute food shortage and serious losses in livestock was the result. The Idjaji parish shouldered the responsibility of saving victims of the climate change by providing food and clothing for three consecutive years. Gradually, the parish shifted its relief aid program to Food For Work (FFW). Food for work means to offer food as payment for people's work, such as building roads, bridges, reforestation, terracing, and irrigation. Furthermore, teaching or training of gardening, nutrition, and health issues were offered to the people who were engaged in the Food for Work Program. The aim of this program was to bring affected people out of food dependency into self-help by rehabilitating their livelihoods. Thus, improved seeds, oxen, and local and appropriate farming tools were provided to the farmers, in order to make sustainable agriculture and to ensure food security as well. Even after the relief aid was over, the parish continued developmental work. The local church was not an external organization coming in to help the poor people, it consisted of the poor, and its members and indigenous ministers shared in the suffering. So, the parish did not leave the area after few years, but remained in place and was committed to long-term sustainable solution. The gospel responded to people as a whole; it did not single out spiritual or just physical needs. For those involved it was a basic principle that the church should be committed to Christian community development and not only to see the soul of a person as a significant, but also his whole of life on earth. This initial period of evangelical presence in the Idjaji area gives an example of how Christian community development begins with people transformed by the love of God, who then respond to God's call to share the gospel with others through evangelism,

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Kanaa Aboma, 20.07.2009.

social action, economic development, and justice. The church was not open only for Sunday service, but responded also to the need of the community around her. In addition to the already mentioned involvement in clinic and school building in the marginalized areas the church engaged in providing water supplies. In the area the lack of water was one of the most serious problems. The people were drawing potable water from the ponds which were not clean for drinking. The ponds had in many places uncovered large blobs of sediment which sometimes were floating on the surface. Due to this problem many were suffering from water born diseases. The availability of safe drinking water on a sustainable basis to communities was a vital challenge. Thus, the parish got involved in providing clean water; such as installing hand pumps, developing springs, sometimes constructing a gravity flow water supply system for the rural areas. In addition, as Mr. Debela Kanaa described in an interview, the appropriate technology was designed with consideration to the environment. It mostly relied on the local resources, required less outside resources, and was easier to maintain at a lower overall cost and caused less impact on the environment. It appeared as a genuine grass roots solution to economic needs, and also very easy to invent and create by village farmers, and craftspeople. In the beginning the cart was initiated and introduced in the parish by the Norwegian pastor Rev. Hans Birger Neergård from the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS). The cart that was introduced was pulled by horse, mule, or donkey. New kind of fuel saving stoves for cooking which were made up of mud, and mud blocks were introduced for house construction. This appropriate technology was sustainable and adaptable in the area and laid a new ground for a self-supporting community. The training was offered to local crafts people by Rev. Neergård in order to introduce and expand the church in Idjaji as well as in other areas. The aim of this project was to make indigenous people self-reliant and to free women who were forced to carry heavy loads on their back; sometimes such burdens caused an abortion of their pregnancies. It also contributes to create income from the local resources. This work was extended to the neighboring districts. Many cart owners people benefited from incomes from the cart and improved their livelihood and thus became self-reliant. More than 400 carts came to be serving the communities for transportation as well for income generation. It was the most suitable and adaptable project to the area. The cart was made of the materials available in the area, so that it could be easily repaired or replaced. More than 2000-3000 persons were able to help themselves from the income from 1989-2000. This economic small scale project played a great role in establishing a self-

sustaining, self-sufficient, and independent community by recognizing that people want to do and will do things for themselves. Furthermore, it alleviated transportation problems in the villages. Generally, these development projects also brought greater recognition and respect for the parish in the area.<sup>59</sup> The Marxist government considered this success as a challenge to its ideology. Thus, in 1986 the Marxist local government feared and envied the church's success performance of development and social service, and began severe persecution against Christians. The parish and synod leaders were imprisoned. They were accused of anti-revolutionary teaching and some congregations were closed. Young Christian students were expelled from the school. Christians were also imprisoned and tortured. Some Christians got their properties confiscated. The critical situation required strong commitment and risky action with heroic faith. The Communist government tried to split the church to fulfill its destructive mission. So, the problem became both internal and external; some backsliders were cooperative and linked to the outsiders and persecutors. The situation was hard for those who wanted to preach the gospel. But in spite of the trouble the Christians did not give up. Rather they committed themselves and re-enforced their unity and continued to preach.<sup>60</sup>

Rev.Diba Abetu, a member of Central Gibe synod officers and the synod establishment committee, described the strong resistance which encountered the parish's work in the following way:

In 1994 the fanatic Muslims feared the fast growing Christianity movement and designed a mechanism of killing and destroying. Due to this tragedy incidence the five diligent members were killed and fourteen were badly injured. It was a difficult time in the history of the Idjaji parish, but the Lord is always carrying out His saving duties with the parish in the persecution. However, Christians did not remain silent, so in that critical and difficult circumstance, the committed and confident Christian community vigorously continued to proclaim the gospel. Although the resistance of the devil through evil doers was strongly continued, and also the power of the gospel and act of the Holy Spirit liberated and changed the evil doers for good. The constant nurturing of the congregations and spiritual life of the believers shaped and improved. Prayer fellowship and the Bible studies were conducted. Gradually the persecutors, killers,

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Debela Kanaa, 20.07.2009.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



robbers, and thieves have received Jesus as their personal savior. They became diligent and important people to the community, as well as active members and ministers of the church. Most of the people got touched by the Holy Spirit, personal and communal transformation took place. After the tragedy, more than 1000 Muslims were converted to Christianity. The intervention and strong move of God amid the great trouble has been seen through His merciful salvation.<sup>61</sup>

Despite many challenges and setbacks, the parish grew rapidly during the following twenty eight years (1962-2001). The Idjaji parish had been operating under the Central Synod which is located in East Wollagga Neqamte town. As a result of its rapid growth and vast area of services, the Idjaji parish was ready to be organized independently as an autonomous unit. Therefore, the Central Gibe Synod in March 29, 2001 was established as a self-reliant synod with five parishes, 64 congregations and 73,610 baptized members. A long plan of EECMY for self-support was for the first time implemented in the Central Gibe Synod. The synod was organized down upward, i.e. the grass root congregations are the source of power and the wealth of the synod. Presently, the synod has 173 congregations and 181,000 baptized members. Thus, the rather new synod has responsibility in its area over all development and evangelism work in West Shewa, the northern part of Jimma, and Eastern part of Wollagga Oromiya region.

The aspect of self-reliance in the synod will be discussed as described in the following sections.

#### 4.2 The aspect of the CGS self-reliance

From its very beginning Christianity spread as a first century Jewish sect and became a religion of the whole Greek and Roman world, and beyond. The early church started without any visible support from outside and has continued to grow and expand its mission strategies. The members of the early church had a sense of ownership. They were dedicated and committed to give their wealth as well their life. The evangelistic work was accompanied by strong commitment and risky action and heroic faith (Acts 2: 44-45; 4:19-21; 5:40-42; 8:1-2). So, self-reliance in its very nature apostolic principle.

According to Rufus Anderson the concept of self-support arises from the existing need to break the circle of dependency and subordination by moving indigenous churches towards self-support

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Diba Abetu, 23.07.2009.

by enabling them to operate by their own local resources in order to support indigenous pastors or ministers, and at the same time to fulfill Christ's mission.<sup>62</sup>

Mr. Bedru Hussen briefly describes the opportunity of self-reliance in the following:

The right foundation as people become Christians and begin to take part in Christian activities, they need to be taught stewardship principles. These principles will become an accepted part of their Christian lives as a believer.

- Church leaders should be an example in practicing to give. In Ethiopia there is a saying "If the king goes bending, the people also bend and go like wise". Hence, church leaders are respected and watched they need to set the precedent. Christians will only be as faithful as their leaders. So, good exemplary leaders can promote the congregations' income in any available resources
- Land is available resources in any society. It is a greatest material recourse for church service.
- Lay people are a major resource. When the lay people are participating in different ministries and feeling a sense of ownership, self-reliance can be easily implemented.<sup>63</sup>

Regarding the Central Gibe Synod from the very beginning the evangelism work was initiated by indigenous persons. But the poor economic life of the community did not allow to initiate the issue of self-reliance. Therefore, the extensive work of awareness building of the economic self-reliance was not implemented at this time. Hence, the circumstance forced the Idjaji parish constantly to look to this cooperating mission partners for financial help. The parish workers continued to be fully employed and paid by mission partners. Also church building was fully funded from abroad by mission partners. But gradually as the volume of the work went on increasing as a result of growth in membership, the mission partners' funding could not cover all the necessary expenses. Most of the workers were suffering due to the lack of financial resources. The parish in 1986 started to teach economic self-reliance for seven consecutive years, but it was not implemented as desired. Most of the parish ministers continued not to be paid on

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<sup>62</sup> Harris, *Nothing but Christ*, 114.

<sup>63</sup> Bedru Hussen, *Stewardship in the Self-Supporting Church*, 24.

time. The congregations were not familiar and committed to thanks-giving, tithes, offerings, and other commitments to God's work. Only a few ministers were poorly-paid. This problem heavily affected the existence of the entire parish and especially its workers. Eventually, as described earlier the financial crisis resulted an internal conflict. However, the conflict of the workers paved the way for outsiders to interfere in the parish's affaires. Some internal members collaborated with outsiders, created dispute and disagreement amongst the workers. The situation was very tough for the parish to carry out its work. In many villages Christians were imprisoned, beaten and tortured. They were segregated from the communities. Also they were deprived of their right to be elected in their respective villages. Congregations were closed and their properties were confiscated by the revolutionary government. In general, the communist government placed restrictions on the activities of the church. Some devoted ministers and Christians persistently and diligently were praying in home cells. The conflicts and the consequences of them took three years until some final solution was found.<sup>64</sup>

Gradually, more favorable conditions were created for the development of the Central Gibe Synod, and also for the purpose of economic self-reliance as described in the following:

Charismatic revival, teaching of awareness building of stewardship and practical steps towards to self-reliance, land as the local income resource, the involvement of lay people, instilling Christians a sense of ownership, good leadership, unity, dedication and commitment of ministers and congregations members, and development of human resources. The above-mentioned reasons and related issues enabled the Central Gibe Synod to be economically self-reliant. In the following subtopics I will briefly present each of the mentioned and their role as factor to promote self-reliance:

#### The Charismatic movement

In 1988 during to the severe and terrible persecution while Christians were praying, many witness reported that the Holy Spirit came down as a thunder on the congregation of Granche, it was reported that even seculars were hearing the voice. It was strongly believed that God interfered in the struggle and manifested himself through his active power then, saying "unite your heart and mind, be honest and faithful, I will clear every challenge in front of you". People

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Diba Abetu, 15.07.2009.

totally gave themselves and demonstrated it practically; the Lord was with them realizing their vision by miraculous signs and wonders among Christians. Most of the people got touched by the Holy Spirit both personally and in fellowship, and their spiritual life was transformed and improved. A new reconciliation was established among church workers, the disputes and tensions seemed to be over. People felt that God was moving and speaking to Christians' heart. The power of God gave them new energy. People were attracted to church and the gospel message through healings, signs and wonders and started to contribute with money to support the work. The power of gospel and the act of the Holy Spirit that also liberated a number of the believers.

The movement emphasized the personal gifts of the Holy Spirit. These spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy; healing, spirit discernment and exorcism and were practiced. It was considered as a normal part of the ministry of every congregation and its believers. Non-Christians flocked into the congregations. The result was the establishment of many new congregations in the Idjaji district. Many lay preachers stood up to bear witness and preach to their own people. The ministry of the congregations and the spiritual life of the believers was transformed and improved. The movement was also embraced by the youth. They conducted prayer, fellowship, and Bible study. Gradually many non-believers and persecutors also received Jesus. Their life was changed and many became diligent and important people in their community, and some also became Church members, and ministers. By this dramatic process of transformation the Christian communities were revitalized, as it was seen, by the Holy Spirit, instead of hatred and killing came love, care and help. People turned to God and each other producing a loving, compassionate and just community of servants of God. Thus, socio-cultural aspects of the community were transformed into the better. For instance customary services such as weddings, funerals, and other collective events were used as opportunities to preach the gospel. Diakonic service was started. In every congregation the Christians were organized in their village as small associations (in Amharic *Idir*) through which they were helping the needy people. Raising an awareness of self-help was strengthened in many congregations. In addition to this, training was given to the families in the church to avoid harmful traditional practices such as kidnapping girls, illegal marriage, early marriage, killing each other during wedding ceremonies, practice of female circumcision, and abusing women physically and psychologically. In some congregations each member was visited by congregation

elders and ministers to make personal contact with all members in their homes in order to encourage Christians to carry out their own duties. Congregation members in their villages and districts ;building wooden bridges, roads by using local hand tools, practicing small-scale irrigation to adapt to the changing climatic conditions, and planting trees by their own local resources and manpower. Congregations were encouraging the poor farmers to provide seeds to rehabilitate their farm. The new believers were engaged to improve their area by shining their light by doing good deeds. They constructed more than 72 km of new roads and built many bridges. Such deeds further influenced and attracted new people to Christianity; as a result the congregations were expanding fast. Also, some poor individuals improved their economic livelihood. The desperate conditions forcing the poor called for a solution. The desperate conditions had been existing for many years in the community, so the problems needed drastic action to bring change.

The most creative long-term solutions to the problems of the poor came from the grass-root and church-based efforts of people who saw themselves as the agents, of Jesus here on earth, in their own neighborhoods and communities. Their calling was looked upon as vital to the Christian community development, which was not a concept that was developed in a classroom, nor formulated by people foreign to the indigenous community. These biblical, practical and principles evolved from years of living and working among the poor. Due to the dramatic change Christianity they played as important role in the area. Jesus was seen as the person who gives bread for hungry, healing for the sick, pardon or restoring wholeness for sinners. People felt that God called them to work with him in order that he can transform the world through them. The mission frontier was to be found where the needs of the people were met in the name of Jesus.<sup>65</sup>

Teaching of awareness building stewardship and practical steps towards to self-reliance.

In 1990 the abroad funding for evangelistic outreach without any notification completely ceased. It was unexpected and shocking for the parish. The parish administrative committee held an urgent meeting to resolve the outreach budget. The committee met in order to find solution. After discussion and prayer, the committee decided to launch fund raising campaign for the outreach activities as described in the following:

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<sup>65</sup> Interviwe with Diba Abetu, 15.07.2009.

- All the parish congregations should get involved in the fund raising.
- On the Sunday service in each congregation teaching and sermon should focus on the stewardship.
- Particularly during the farmers harvest season from September-November a main focus of the Sunday service should be on teaching of stewardship in all the congregations.
- Congregation leaders should act as good model in practicing stewardship.
- In each congregation the elders should diligently and attentively follow up the fund raising campaign.

The parish administrative committee assigned a special committee for implementing fund raising campaigns. The general responsibility of this committee was:

- To teach stewardship on Sunday service in the congregations.
- To motivate and encourage the congregations for fundraising.
- To encourage and advise the congregations elders.
- To collect fund.

The committee's responsibility was the initial phase of fund raising campaigns, after that the main responsibility was transferred to the elders and steering committee of the congregations.

The assigned committee successfully fulfilled its mission. More than expected funds were collected by the committee from the congregations. The outreach funding from abroad had in the Ethiopian currency birr been 1000-1200 (Nok 500-600), but the collected funds from the congregations were birr 3000 (Nok 1500). This attempt convinced the parish of its own strength on which it could now support the congregations and parish office ministers. The financial crisis had forced the parish to look for the new resources. After that the teaching of stewardship, accompanied by prayer and diligent follow up, were carried on by the congregations' elders, lay preachers and ministers. A home visitation program was conducted by the pastors, congregation elders, and different congregation committee leaders. They were using every opportunity to raise

biblical teaching of stewardship. Presently the yearly total running costs of the synod is birr 3,000,000. This annual budget is fully supported by the local congregations.<sup>66</sup>

The ability of using the local income resource.

Local resources are a vital factor for a sustainable development of indigenous churches.

The local sources of the Central Gibe Synod were:

Farming land, tithing, and flour mill, cafeteria, guest house, shop, and bank.

#### Farming Land

The Ethiopian economy heavily depends on agriculture. Approximately by 85% of the population gain their livelihood directly from farming. So, the land is the greatest and most essential material resource for the country. The population growth caused a shortage of land; it was also very difficult for the congregations to get land. However, after long processes and tireless efforts of the congregations, land was given to some congregations, and the others rented from more wealthy individuals. In the Central Gibe Synod, the land is the most important resource for economic growth of the congregations. This will be described in the following.

Unity, dedication and commitment of ministers and congregations members.

Many congregations organized in home cell groups of 5 to 15 members in order to offer adequate service for all their members. The cell group conducts its prayer and the Bible study regularly once a week. The cell groups represented a good opportunity for the Christians to get to know each other, and develop a feeling of good neighborhoods. Also, all the cell groups in the village, about 200 people, were coming together once a month at the center, in a prayer house to discuss their congregation affairs and other related issues. The cell group was headed by laymen. The senior pastor and the congregation elders were visiting the cell groups once a month in order to encourage them. As the church grew bigger, there was no better way to take care of every member than through cell groups. The cell groups were the most important means for congregation income generating. The members of these cell groups were mostly farmers and occupied with sowing, weeding and harvesting as a joint venture. From the initial ploughing to

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Diba Abetu, 15.07.2009.

the final harvest, each cell group was responsible for performing the labor. This work had to be completed according to the congregation's guidance and fixed schedules. Finally when the grain was harvested and ready, it was sold by the congregation's elders. In addition to their labor, they gave tithes, thanks giving, and different kinds of offerings in cash. Gradually, through the motivation from cell groups the congregation created a sustainable local income such as by a flourmill, honey bee farming, cafeterias, shops, and tithes in cash in order to offer adequate service for all their members. Currently, the congregations have 65 flour mills. The flourmill service has two main purposes:

The old system of grinding grain into flour was one of the most labor-intensive tasks performed by women in rural areas. It takes about half an hour to grind a kilogram of flour by hand, but only about one minute when using a motor-driven grinding mill. Thus, the flour mills are requested by the women who have been severely affected by the saddle stone. Motorized mills would save most of these women the back-breaking chore of pounding or grinding grain for their households. Therefore, the main purpose was, to help the women who have been grinding to make flour by using saddle stones. By kneeling in front of the stone, the operator used a back and forth method of working it. The stones were simply pushed backwards and forwards without any rolling motion, the grain being placed on the lower stone in handfuls as required. Such traditional way of grinding grains heavily affected rural women. They spent much time, and effort in grinding grain. The difficult life situation of the women forced the synod to look abroad for cooperating partners for funding aid to purchase flour mills over five years. Since the funding from abroad was not secured, through teaching and prayer, one by one 65 flour mills were purchased and installed by indigenous Christians own fund raising. The requested fund from the cooperating partners was approximately Ethiopian birr 350,000 for purchase of five flour mills, but in the end as many as 65 flour mills were for approximately for birr 3,000,000 by indigenous Christian fund raising . These efforts were achieved by the Christians through difficult challenges. The challenges will be discussed in the proceeding chapter.

The second purpose was to develop the economy of the congregations by generating income.

As mentioned-above, the people of Idjaji have been heavily affected by the poverty and oppression. Thus, the life of the people was deplorable. Then, how did they manage to lift up their congregations' economy in such a situation?



As Diba Abetu described in interview; A Macedonia Christians gave from their deep poverty and from their heart and deep inside love, so, the Central Gibe Synod congregation members did the same thing. They gave from their deep poverty, as an unbelievable generosity. They gave themselves willingly and fully to support the work with their possessions. Pastors, evangelists, laymen workers, and congregation elders played a great role to fulfill the goal. They were, encouraging, teaching, visiting, praying, advising, and through personal contact many Christians were motivated and inspired to support and to promote their congregations' economy. The leadership of the synod played a vital role in motivating and encouraging Christians to look for new income resources in order to move them away from the economic dependency syndrome.<sup>67</sup>

The following describes how Christians were generating income for their congregations' economic self-reliance.

#### Leadership and lay responsibility

Good leadership is one precondition to become self-reliant. According to Kenyon, a good leader is:

A servant, shepherd, trustworthy and faithful.

A servant leader is concerned with the spiritual and personal development of those he serves, and ultimately he strives to create new servants.<sup>68</sup>

Commitment, devotion, willingness, tolerance, and courage on the part of the leader are qualities to provide self-reliance. Leaders who are able to win the heart of the people can fulfill this goal. In the Central Gibe synod the leaders and congregation elders who do not practise tithes giving cannot be appointed or elected as a leader. Therefore, the exemplary deed of a leader has a great value for the church growth.

When a church increases in number and growing fast, it is difficult to render adequate service to all church members, so the mobilization, preparation, and utilization of gifted and committed of laymen is crucial to reach the church members. Thus, in the CGS many gifted, committed and

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Diba Abetu, 23.07.2009.

<sup>68</sup> Kenyon, *A resource book wholistic approach*, 66.

dedicated laypeople played a great role to serve many Christians. It was regarded as the priesthood of all believers and it was supported by many volunteers.

Many Christians were very serious in taking care of the church property. During the war between the Marxist government and the Ethiopian people's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), Christians were protecting the parish and congregation properties against thefts and damage. During that war many private and public properties were stolen and damaged, but the parish and congregation properties were guarded well by the local Christians. The self-devotion, feeling of ownership and unity of the Christians promoted the congregation economy.

### Human resource development

The poor economic situation had strongly hampered the spread of education. The government spent relatively little on education in the area. This situation forced the parish to give wholistic ministry including this aspect of life. The parish was, in fact, the pioneer in the area in promoting education.

As Stain, Burkey says,

*The poor, if not oppressed by the more powerful, are oppressed by their own limited knowledge and poverty. Their lack of knowledge and information prevents them from competing successfully for their fair share of resources and keeps them from effectively utilizing the resources that they do control. So human development involves the strengthening of the personality and the acquisition of knowledge and information.*<sup>69</sup>

According to Venn's theory, when financial self-support is implemented in the indigenous church, the indigenous ministers will be encouraged and motivated to evangelize their own people and others too. It promotes self-extension. Self-support is interconnected with self-propagation and self-governing. To be a fully self-supporting church is to be economically independent from abroad economic dependency.<sup>70</sup> Human resources development constitutes the foundation up on which material development can occur, and education represents a major form of human resources development. Besides, it is widely believed that the expansion of educational opportunities is a keystone to the country's accelerated socio-economic

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<sup>69</sup> Burkey, *People first a guide to Self-Reliant*, 52.

<sup>70</sup> Yates, *Venn and Victorian Bishops abroad*, 134-35.

development. Education provides a fundamental base for all further human development of any society.

The main goal of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson was to lift up indigenous ministers in providing capacity of development and training for enabling them to take up various responsibilities of the missionary endeavor, ordain indigenous people, in order to give them great hierarchal responsibilities and authority and ensure the capability of the local church to support itself and carry out its task without foreign support.

Therefore, the Central Gibe synod believed that the significance of human resource development was a keystone to the fulfillment of its mission. Hence, the Executive Committee of the synod resolved to work for an opportunity of education to the pastors and evangelists, who had been serving the congregations for long time. The main goal of the synod was to strengthen the initiated self-support in enhancing the ministers' education and their depth of theological knowledge as well.<sup>71</sup> The fund of the so called in country scholarship for training and education was fully covered by local congregations. The decision was fully implemented by many congregations, starting from primary school up to the university level; approximately more than 109 people have been educated up to this present day. The education is academic and theological as well. Out of these elite people eight are serving in government institutions. In addition to human development, the salary increment, and additional benefit or bonus for all workers of the synod such as giving grains for each pastor or evangelist up to 900kg every year. This has also contributed to the growth of the local income. As the congregations take care of their ministers, they are encouraged to serve their congregations from their heart.

#### 4.3 The aspect of self-governing

According to Anderson's theory, self-governing consists in lifting up and empowering indigenous church leaders to be able to take the leadership of the local church. Thus, the indigenous church management should be turned from foreign dependency to national leadership to promote self-service and self-willed development rather than depending on the foreign fund. The task of the foreign missionaries should be to encourage a development aiming at setting the indigenous church free from the western colonial forces. Besides, Venn pointed out that the self-governing aim of indigenous churches is not to drive out foreign missionaries, instead they

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<sup>71</sup> *Minutes of the CGS 5<sup>th</sup> regular Executive Committee, Dec. 2002,5.*

should work together in true brotherhood on the basis of genuine equality.<sup>72</sup> Hodges' understanding of self-governing is to feel a sense of spiritual responsibility which is interconnected with self-support and self-propagation. A central point is to promote indigenous people for church responsibility.<sup>73</sup>

The Central Gibe Synod became a self-governed entity. It developed administrative structural units at all levels run by indigenous leadership. It got its own constitution. It was organized down upward, i.e. its power came to be found on the grass root of congregations. The congregations became the sources of its power and wealth. The self-efforts of income generated by the local Christians created a convenient situation for self-reliance. According to Anderson and Venn's theory the three selfs are interconnected. As the three selfs are implemented in the indigenous church, it becomes a fully self-reliant church. The unity and the commitment of all the synod ministers and congregations resulted in the opportunity of being self-reliant, because ministers and congregation members committed themselves to serve their congregations under the existing administrative structure at all levels. A healthy communication developed from top to bottom or from bottom to top. The synod has the responsibility of propagating the gospel and running the structure or administration by its own indigenous leaders. It has its own constitution and decision making process.

The synod and cooperating partners established a working fellowship on a basis of genuine equality. Self-support did not, however, aim at taking away the presence of cooperating partners and to be isolated from the global body of Christ.

The Central Gibe Synod- structure of decision making:

1. Assembly of the synod delegates and its duties:

This is the highest decision making body. It conducts its meeting every four years. The delegates of the Assembly are; the congregations' representatives, the synod officers, the parish coordinators, and the parishes' chairperson. The synod department heads are participating without the right to vote. Observers; the national church president, and departments' coordinators of the church. The Assembly elects the synod president, vice synod president, treasurer of the

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<sup>72</sup> Harris, *Nothing but Christ*, 112-3.

<sup>73</sup> Hodges, *The Indigenous Church and Spring Field*, 23.

synod, and two administration members of the synod. The Assembly passes also on the policy decision. It forms the constitution of the synod.<sup>74</sup>

## 2. Executive Committee of the synod members and its duties:

It conducts its meeting every four month.

Synod officers, the parishes' coordinators and chair persons of the parishes, participate with the right to vote, the synod departments coordinators are participate without the right to vote.<sup>75</sup>

The committee is responsible for implementing the policy and decision of the Assembly.

It elects the executive secretary of the synod, and synod, department coordinators.

## 3. Synod officers:

Conducts meeting every two weeks. It is responsible for implementing the synod executive committee's resolutions. Members with the right to vote:

Synod president, vice president, and treasurer. The synod Executive secretary participates without the right to vote.<sup>76</sup>

## 4. Parish Convention

The congregations chair persons are the member of the convention with the right to vote. The parish coordinator and workers, congregation workers are members without the right to vote.

The parish Convention elects the parish coordinator and chair person. It passes the policy decision of the parish.<sup>77</sup>

## 5. Parish administrative committee:

It conducts its meeting every two months.

It is responsible for implementing the synod committee resolutions and its parish's as well.

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<sup>74</sup> *Central Gibe Synod's Constitutions and Bylaws*, 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>76</sup> *Central Gibe Synod's Constitutions and Bylaws*, 12.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

It approves the annual budget of the parish.

6. Congregation Annual Convention:

It conducts its meeting twice a year. It elects its elders for two years. It approves the annual budget and financial report of the congregation.<sup>78</sup>

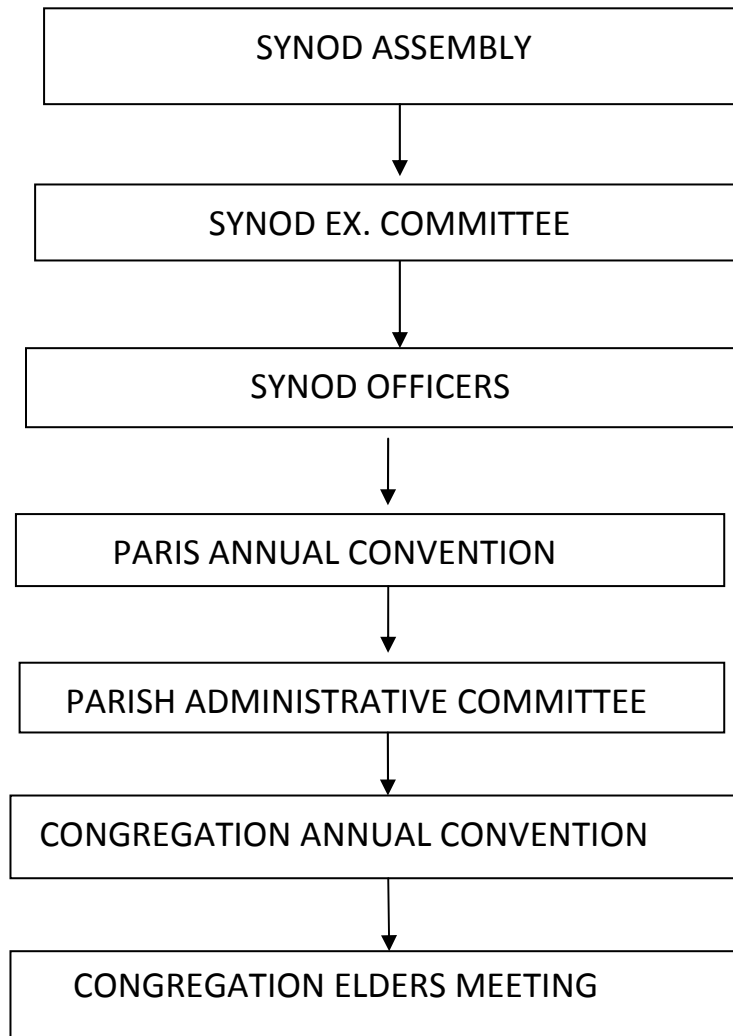
7. Congregation elders meeting:

They conduct their meeting every Saturday with prayer and discussion of different issues.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 39.

The Central Gibe Synod's decision making process is indicated in the following:



#### 4.4 The aspect of self-propagation

The basic idea of self-propagation consists in the act of bearing witness to non-Christians in order to win them to Jesus by indigenous ministers. These efforts create self-extension, by a living church. A church is in its very nature created to propagate, and a church which does not propagate will die. According to Hodges, a church is a missionary on the earth to fulfill the great

commission of the Lord Jesus. It motivates many local church members to bear witness to non-Christians with the gospel.<sup>80</sup>

According to Venn and Anderson's theory of self-propagation a main concern is to train in order to promote the indigenous people to evangelize their own people in a way that people may feel at home with the gospel. Indigenous people have their own ways and customs and ways of understanding. Indigenous ministers will generally always be the best to possess adequate vitality in order to reproduce and extend the church in their own region by their own efforts without foreign help. This self-motivation arises and encourages the indigenous Christians to establish a church and evangelize other people, and in turn, these people would establish another pioneering church, in so doing the church is extended and expanded. The aim is self-extension and expansion.<sup>81</sup>

As depicted earlier the Central Gibe synod from very beginning started evangelizing work by indigenous people in the vernacular language. Through severe persecution and strong resistance, from a cell group a single congregation was founded. Gradually, through extensive witness and prayer, healing service and nurturing the new converts, this single congregation multiplied into several congregations. As already accounted for the congregations organized into parishes, and in turn the parishes established the Central Gibe Synod. The synod has continued to flourish and to extend its evangelistic work beyond its own territory. Furthermore, the synod has attempted to be involved in the foreign mission work of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

What was the method of the Central Gibe Synod aim of self-propagation?

Equipping and empowering laypeople to bear witness to non-Christian friends, relatives, and neighbors in any available opportunities. It was wholeheartedly commitment to this purpose.

At the beginning new congregations were supported by a mother congregation to furnish their own church work, such as church building, training, and its own evangelist salary and short spiritual training for members and elders. The supporting was carried on until they fully became self-reliant. Of course it was not continued for ever, it was only for three years, the support was

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<sup>80</sup> Hodges, *The Indigenous Church and Spring Field*, 42.

<sup>81</sup> Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 194.



not to encourage dependency upon the mother congregation. Ultimately when the new born congregation grows, it can afford to cover all its work expenses.

The training method was firstly a mobile system at their congregations and villages via their cell groups. Then, a permanent center (Bible school) was established, with a training program for 1-2 years. Thus, in practising so, first, believers established a church and evangelized other people and in turn, these people established another pioneering church, to be included in the synod. Thus, according to the following all the synod congregations had responsibility of helping new outreach and new preaching places within their work territories.

- Each established congregation had the responsibility of the new preaching places, paying full evangelist salaries, by providing trained evangelists to the preaching places.
- The mother congregation should assist in funding the newly born congregation including a worship house.
- The expense of training evangelists should fully be covered by the mother congregation.
- Teaching of stewardship for self-supporting was vital and obligatory.
- The preaching place should be able to start fund raising after one year; the amount was birr 4000-5000.
- The support of the mother congregation to infant congregations (preaching place) should last only for three successive years.
- After the infant congregation was spiritually developed, it applied for membership.
- The preaching place members were required to accept the synod constitution and bylaws.
- After all above processes are completed, the establishment of the new congregation was approved by the synod Executive Committee, and this congregation continued its self-extension (Res.no.1-6-93, 37). It was in this way the congregations were multiplied and expanded.

Generally, motivation, deep concern and commitment of laypeople played a great role for effective self-extension of the Central Gibe Synod.

#### 4.5 The aspect of self-theologizing

According to Hiebert, a main object of the church is to make the gospel understandable and adaptable to indigenous people within their own cultural tradition. An indigenous person would communicate Christianity more effectively in the context of his own people than a person from outside. Further, the aim is to encourage and raise the ability of an indigenous church to read and interpret scripture within its local culture, and also to develop the necessary responsibility and maturity for these tasks. It is contextualization understood as putting the message of the gospel into the context of the culture. So it enables the indigenous church to recruit its own theologians so that the truth of the scripture is understood within the context of the language of that culture. When the message of the gospel is shared by those of that culture, it is more readily embraced.<sup>82</sup>

According to Hiebert, the encounter of the gospel with culture began to take place with incarnation. The very fact that Jesus, was born in a particular place, spoke the language of that people, followed largely its customs and traditions, lived the life experience of his people, their religion, their philosophy and made his home there, is a model for the church in all times and places. Jesus shared his relation to God with his people in correspondence with their categories of thought, their background and their mentality. He questioned some of their settled ways of life and overthrew whatever was negative in their culture.

God's word always comes in human words; this means that human words have the innate capacity to become God's word. We may continue to say that the human culture values have the openness and inspiration to be assumed by Jesus and by his values. The word of God transcends the cultures in which it has found expression and has the capacity of being spread in other cultures in such a way as to be able to reach all human beings in the cultural context they live.<sup>83</sup>

In the case of the Central Gibe Synod the gospel was from the very beginning proclaimed in the vernacular by indigenous laypersons. All in all, the church service was carried out in the local language. But the challenges were the foreign melodies of hymns or spiritual songs which were

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<sup>82</sup> Hiebert, *Anthropological Insight for Missionaries*, 196-67.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 29-35.

completely different from the local. Christians were not able to adapt songs to the local melodies, most of the congregation members were not able to sing foreign hymns properly during their worship. Further, expressions of the local culture were generally lacking. In general, the local culture was considered as negative and evil. This caused Christianity to be seen as a foreign religion. The problem was a lack of ability to distinguish between constructive and harmful tradition. Of course, there were life-negating elements in the culture which needed change.

The charismatic renewal however, motivated young people to sing in their local melodies. They felt that the Holy Spirit inspired them to sing spiritual songs from their own melodies. New songs with local melodies were created from time to time; and many young people were attracted to the church. The life-negating elements in the culture were purified and transformed. In the synod self-theologizing practice is to some extent translated into practice, but in this respect the synod is expected to do more.

#### 4.6 The aspect of local government co-operation

With the advent of Christianity, the idea of two separate orders emerged, based on Jesus' command to "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Mark 12:17). Government and religious institutions are separate and independent from each other.

Historically Ethiopia used to be a Christian country, despite that there are a Muslim population since the introduction of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Thus until the fall of the monarchy in 1974 by a military junta called Derg, there was a strong relation between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the state. The 1974 Revolution led to the separation of church and state. Till now the separation of the state and church is kept.

In respect to EECMY, her motto is wholistic ministry which focuses on both evangelism and development/social service to meet the needs of the Ethiopian people. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus-Development and Social Services Commission is engaged in wholistic ministry and social services to see a society that is redeemed through the gracious work of Jesus Christ that is reconciled to God; and where all spiritual, physical, socio-cultural needs are met and where all people are living in harmony, solidarity, equality, justice and peace. Therefore, in respect to development or social service, the cooperation with the local government is obligatory. The development project assessment, work activity and work evaluation should be done with

government cooperation. In the beginning, to undertake development projects, the agreement should be signed between the Church Development and the Social Services Commission (EECMY-DASSC). Cooperation with the government for development work is vital. The church development is fully financed by the cooperating mission organization. The task of EECMY-DASSC is to coordinate and empower the synods development and social services. But the evangelism work is carried out by the church independently. When we come to the synods' Development and Social Services Commission (DASSC) each synod was extended to cooperate with the regional government. The project is fully financed by the cooperating mission organization. But the congregations' development activity is fully supported by the local congregations. Thus, my discussion is focused on the social work which is fully supported by the local resources and manpower. It is a self-help project which resulted in the life transformation of the congregation members. The aim of the social work is to generate income for their congregations, parishes, and the synod, and also to bring change in their areas. In addition to this, they are assisting the needy people amongst them. The social work carried out by the congregations is such as:

- Farming, the Christians are farming in groups to promote their congregations economy. This is familiarized in many congregations.
- Honey bee farming.
- Installing flour mills. As already mentioned poor Christians committed themselves to give from their deep poverty, in order to strength the evangelistic work.

Cooperation with local government is helpful to carry out effective social work in the area. Currently in Ethiopia the land in principle belongs to the state, not individuals and cannot be sold. But land was given to individuals at their disposal, so, it is compulsory to get farming land from the local government. In the beginning the congregations faced a great challenge. The local government was not willing to offer farming land to the congregations, because such vision was not familiarized before. What had been practised, was to offer land only for church buildings. All actions of farming land encountered strong resistance from the local government,

Christians however, did not abandon the vision of generating income; they gave farming land to their congregation from their own. Some congregations rented from individuals. Eventually, in

some remote and remote areas the efforts of Christian development activities such as; constructing roads, irrigations, and etc., for all regardless, of religion, sex, ethnic and e.tc., made Christians popular and acceptable in the area. Hence, the local authority was convinced to provide land to the congregations for the purpose of their development and activities.

Generally, the ability of using local resources, the willingness and commitment of the indigenous ministers created favorable conditions for the opportunity of the synod self-reliance.

## Chapter Five

### 5. CONCLUDING CHAPTER

#### 5.1 Present day situation and challenges

I have given an analysis and presentation of the history and development of the three self-principles in the EECMY with special reference to the CGS. I will conclude this thesis by making a brief outlook to the present situation, and see to what extent these principles are implemented and in force today. Can the EECMY-CGS be described as a self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating, and self-theologizing church today? What are obtained in the course of the years and what is perhaps still remaining? These issues will be discussed in the following sections:

##### 5.1.1 The weakness and strength of the EECMY regarding the three self-principles

Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson came up with the idea of three selfs; self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing. The formula was a new church planting strategy in order to bring out African and Asian churches from western paternalism. There was some historical background which casts light on why these two men devised this mission strategy. Very often missionaries had developed the method of using a mission station as base for approaching the indigenous people. In a mission station there was a missionaries' compound, a church and westernized school and printing facilities. Missionaries lived on these compounds. They helped new converts to leave their own culture and adopt western culture. As a result, new Christians began to depend on western missionaries socially, culturally and economically. They had no chance to exercise their own leadership among the nationals in their own country. This did not seem to be really effective in planting the gospel in another culture or making the gospel adaptable. Then due to the severe economic crisis Christians were employed fully by missionaries and received much material assistances. This increased financial paternalism and ultimately created a strong relation of dependency. In that circumstance, encouraging and empowering indigenous Christians to develop self-help would not be thought. This resulted in a general idea of Christianity as a foreign religion, thus it was not embraced by indigenous people. Therefore they devised the three selfs as follows;

Self-support means that indigenous churches should be run by their own finances, without depending upon missionaries' material help. Self-propagation means that indigenous Christians should take the responsibility of preaching the gospel to their own people in the way they can understand. Hence, the task of missionaries is to teach them and back them up. Self-governing means that the national church should be run by the national leadership, not by missionaries. At that time their formula was a revolutionary one to alleviate the already existing western churches' colonial attitude and cultural domination. Due to the African ministers' inadequate education and Christian faith background, it was considered impossible to appoint them. Therefore, Venn was pushing foreign missionaries to empower and equip African indigenous ministers in order to lift them up. However, through Henry Venn's great effort, African ministers were appointed. Rufus Anderson had also played a great role to make indigenous churches' financially self-supporting. According to their theory all the three formula; self-support, self-propagation, and self-governing are interrelated. Hence, the three selfs should be implemented for full independence to be established. Venn and Rufus opposed in the name of civilization to impose western cultural domination on the Asian and African churches. Their main goal was to make Asian and African indigenous churches independent and mature enough to run their work by the national leaders, ministers, and funding without foreign help. Venn and Anderson believed that spoon feeding by foreign missionaries created rice Christians. From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, China faced severe economic problems; many Christian ministers were employed by missionaries and received much material assistance. This produced rice Christians who lived as believers while they received material benefits, but left the church when the assistance ceased. They were more opportunist than Christians. Venn and Anderson emphasized the need for true conversion, which was reflected by the willingness of local Christians to support the work of the church. This methodology created favorable conditions for African and Asian churches to be free from western colonialism. As a result, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to a vast extent shaped their mission strategy to the theory of Venn and Anderson.<sup>84</sup>

In regard to EECMY, from the very beginning the aim of the missionaries in Ethiopia was not to establish a new church but to revive and work with the already existing church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Their effort failed due to strong resistance from the Orthodox Church.

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<sup>84</sup> Williams, *The Ideal of the Self-Governing Church*, 20.

Therefore, the missionaries were forced to commence evangelistic work independently. They suffered a lot to fulfill this mission, some even sacrificed their life. The people they evangelized also were in a desperate situation. Thus, the missionaries needed to respond to their needs, they were forced to provide material help for basic necessity and to develop social service as well. Gradually, the development and social service was accepted by the state and community at large. Clinics, hostels, hospitals, and school buildings were highly accepted. Especially the health service alleviated the multifaceted problems of the people. As many people were suffering from various diseases, the health institutions played a vital role to help the sick. This paved the way for evangelistic work. Here, in addition to evangelism work and facing the existing impoverished life of the people the missionaries were forced to focus on assisting. The missionaries had compassion for the needy people by meeting their needs; in fact this was looked upon as a biblical-based and good intention. Then what was sustainable solution to bring them out of the situation? Empowering and equipping indigenous people on how to use their local resources that can be sustained. By providing them technical assistance, it would be possible to encourage them to help themselves. As Mr. Emmanuel Abraham described, missionaries and national church leaders and ministers did not pay adequate attention to the local economy that can be sustained. Thus, the numerical and structural development of the church over the past half a century without equal consideration of economy and other resources caused long term economic dependency. The schools, clinics, hostels, and hospitals were fully supported by missionaries. Today most of the social institutions are handed over to the government. Because the social institutions were not able to run their work by local economic resources. Still many joint program institutions of EECMY- such as Development And Social Services Commission (DASSC), Mekane Yesus Seminary (MYS), Yemisrach Dimts Radio program, and the School for the Deaf are fully supported by foreign cooperating partners. Most synods were not fully able to run their work by local economic resources. Of course, there was some promising progress in order to overcome economic subordination and dependency.<sup>85</sup> As earlier described the leadership and the proclamation of the gospel were carried out by the indigenous people. In terms of financial resources however, the local contribution of EECMY does not seem to have kept pace with the growth of the members and structures, surely, the issue of church dependency

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Emmanuel Abraham, 15.07.2009.



cannot be considered in isolation from the overall question of the country's impoverishment, natural disaster, and instability of political issues. Thus, the EECMY has so far economically not fully accomplished the desired goal. Certainly, the church's vision is to come to the attainment level of being fully self-reliant, so she is diligently and vigorously dealing with it. Some of the units are almost able to carry out their work by their local income. Amongst them the Central Gibe synod is able to run evangelistic work by its local resources. However, the weakness and strength of the Central Gibe Synod in the aspect of the three selfs will be discussed in the following sections.

#### 5.1.2 The weakness of the CGS in the aspect of self-reliance

According to the Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn's theory, self-support is considered as a means of setting free from the dependency and subordination by lifting up indigenous Christians to run their own local church work by their local resources. This includes paying the salary of all ministers without depending on foreign fund. And also to take the full responsibility of the church work includes bearing the burden of supporting the life of the church financially and evangelizing with one's own funds and talents. Venn and Anderson pointed out that in theological circles; self-reliance is usually approached in terms of self-support, self-propagation, self-governing. These three dimensions are so closely inter-related that they should be treated together.<sup>86</sup> Mr. Bedru Hussen described the aspect of self-reliance, as people become Christians, they need to be taught stewardship principles as part of their life as believers.<sup>87</sup>

In regard to the Central Gibe Synod from very beginning due to the unfavorable economic situation such as drought, epidemic diseases and poverty were considered as obstacles to self reliance. Hence, the self-reliance construction was not implemented at the right time. In addition to this, the internal problem which split the unity of workers and created enmity between them was a great obstacle for synod economic self-support. The internal conflicts and disagreement between parish coordinator, congregation elders, and pastors and evangelist caused the weakness of the parish.

The congregations were not aware of contributing substantially with their strengths and resources. There was no proper communication between the parish and congregations. There was

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<sup>86</sup> Harris, *Nothing but Christ*, 114

<sup>87</sup> Bedru Hussen, *Stewardship in the Self- Supporting Church*, 24.

no mutual support, encouragement, and motivation between congregations, parish and the individual workers. Before 1998 the church financial management system was not in a good condition. At parish level there was kind of an auditing system by the synod internal auditor .But at congregation level; there was no planning, reporting and monitoring routines that ensured that expenditures were in accordance with available funds. There was no income and expenses receipt system. So it was impossible to control the congregation's finances. The congregations also did not have any information about their congregation financial situation. In addition, the improper financial management and church's properties caused an economic crisis in the Idjaji parish. Christians were not willing to give their tithes and thanks giving. There was no alternative rather than waiting for funding from abroad for the all workers salaries and worship house buildings. It was a very difficult situation. The ministers were generally not committed and dedicated to serve people from their heart. They were serving in order to get incentives, it was not a loving serving, and there was little vision for growth. Thus, from 1973-1998, the entire church expenses were fully covered by foreign funding. Economic self-reliance was unthinkable. This created a full pattern of paternalism of foreign cooperating partners. It seemed impossible to provide enough local resources. Self-confidence, self-determination, self-realization, and self-help were thought of as means of self- development. A main point in the mentality was that indigenous capacities would not reach to cope with the situation and the way challenges of the church.

Lack of awareness of spiritual responsibility was also a high reason for dependency. But when the foreign funding was blocked without any notification, the congregations and parish were forced to struggle for existence.

Generally, before 1998 the entire parish evangelistic work encountered a great challenge to carry out its work. Among the challenges were economic limitation, lack of awareness and commitment, internal conflicts of the parish workers and the poor financial management.

#### 5.1.2.1 The weakness of the CGS in the aspect of self-governing.

In the view of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson the leadership of the local church should be run by indigenous leaders. When the indigenous people could take over the responsibility of the church, true indigenous self-governing would be established. Hence, the task of the foreign missionaries is to promote and empower indigenous ministers for church responsibility. Self-governing consists in self-willed leadership. A Self-governing church has a better witness to the community, since it is of an indigenous nature. Indigenous self-governing churches are led, run, and supervised by indigenous persons who are raised among the converts.<sup>88</sup> Indigenous self-governing churches need adequate and proper training, skills, and experiences.

What was the cause of weakness of the Idjaji parish from 1973-1991?

The internal conflict and contradiction in the parish began since its inception. From 1973-1979 two parish leaders were rejected and forced to leave their posts. It was a great challenge for the Central Synod to carry out the work in the parish. Again from 1979- 1986 two new parish leaders were appointed to lead the parish, but due to unfavorable circumstances they were not willing to lead the leadership position for a long time and finally left. In 1987 the parish leader with the synod leaders was imprisoned. There was no possibility and motivation for evangelism work within the entire parish. There was no tithing, thanks giving and offerings. A few workers were poorly paid. The conflicts took three years until some final solution was found.

#### 5.1.2.2 The weakness of CGS in the aspects of self-propagation

Church self- propagation consists in producing itself. A growing church always produces itself. In the beginning, Christians established a church and evangelized other people, and in turn, these people established other pioneering churches .In so doing it was extended. So, indigenous churches should have adequate strength to produce and extend by their own efforts without foreign help, and also to be involved in mission work. Usually, indigenous evangelists are more effective at evangelism and church planting within their own culture, by their knowledge of

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<sup>88</sup> Harris, *Nothing but Christ*, 112-13.

approaches that appeal to the people, and by their understanding of the decision making process of their own people.<sup>89</sup>

As Rev. Asfaw Terfassa, the Central Synod president said, in the Central Gibe Synod from the very beginning the gospel was proclaimed by indigenous evangelists within the people's culture and language. In this regard, there was no problem, but economically, the evangelistic work was fully supported by the mission cooperating partners. Of course, it is convincing that in the beginning the infant church needs help in order to furnish its work and support its pastors. But if the church continues for a long time to be fed only by a mother church or cooperating partners, she does not grow into maturity, and is not able to walk on her feet, she will remain as an infant. Here, the problem was obvious, the effective teaching of stewardship was not given in order to enable the local church to grow and expand her mission work strategies. Reaching others with the gospel was limited on the available fund from foreign cooperating partners. When the fund was received, the outreach work was carried out, but when there was no fund from abroad the work was not done. Self-help efforts were not carried out at that time and there was no church economic growth. Congregations were not familiar with tithing. So Christians were not participating in evangelistic work. Hence, there was no feeling of ownership, the evangelistic task was considered as the mandate of the missionaries. Most of the ministers were not called by their local congregation. They were employed by the synod without the consent of the congregations. So they were not committed to the local work. Many served in the church as long as they were getting benefits. This was evident during the time of persecution; most of the ministers did not commit themselves to church work, and some abandoned their faith. Hence, the synod was not fully self-reliant until 1998.<sup>90</sup>

#### 5.1.2.3 The weakness of CGS in the aspect of self-theologizing

In addition to the above three self-principles the local church should also be able to develop its own theologians so that the truth of the scripture can be understood within the context of its own culture. When the message of the gospel is shared by those of that culture, it is more easily embraced.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 194.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Asfaw, Terfassa, 25, 07 2009.

<sup>91</sup> Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 207-8.

In the Central Gibe Synod the gospel was shared with non-Christians in the vernacular language. In all congregations the gospel was proclaimed in the vernacular languages. But the challenge was the foreign melodies of hymns or spiritual songs, which were completely different from the local. It was not easy to make it adaptable to the indigenous Christians melodies. Thus, most of the congregation members were not able to sing foreign hymns during their worship. Then the church was not able to create songs in the local melodies. Furthermore, the expressions of the local cultures were usually wrongly comprehended. Due to this, Christianity was seen as a foreign religion. Above here I have dealt with the discussion of the cause CGS weakness in the aspect the three 'selves' and self-theologizing. In the proceeding section the strength of the synod will be discussed.

#### 5.1.3 The strength of the CGS in the aspect self-support.

According to Andersons' theory self-support is to break the yoke of dependency and subordination by enabling local ministers to run and to operate by their own local resources to support fully their pastors, ministers, and the entire church activities. The national pastors should receive their living allowances from tithes and offerings given by their local congregations.<sup>92</sup>

As earlier described the parish went through great challenges. What was done to overcome these challenges?

First reconciliation was made between the parish coordinator and workers through repentance. Unity was restored and the workers committed themselves anew to fulfill Christ's mission. This reconciliation was extended to all congregations. Now Christians felt inspired by the Holy Spirit to be involved in the evangelistic work.

On the other hand, the overseas funding for evangelistic outreach, without any notification, completely ceased. Even though, it was unexpected and shocking for the parish, through teaching, prayer, encouraging, visit, evaluation, discussion on congregations' convention, and diligent follow up, a fund raising campaign was implemented in all congregations. Young laypersons were inspired and motivated to serve the church earnestly. The congregations began to give their tithes in kind and in cash. The problem of economic crisis was alleviated by local

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<sup>92</sup> Harris, *Nothing but Christ*, 114.

resources through tithes and offering of congregations. The budget of the synod increased. The permanent budget was allocated to the church workers and salary increments were done every two years. In addition to the salary increment, additional bonus for all workers of the synod such as in terms of grains encouraged and motivated them. This played a great role to contribute to the growth of the local income. The congregations made different efforts to promote the local income, such as installing flourmills, solar light, purchasing minibus vehicles and farming for the church. It was evidently seen as the presence of God in the church ministry. New blessings were obtained from the local resources rather than from a distance. In the same way to Hagar, when she was mistreated and fled from Abraham house and suffering in the desert with her son, God opened her eyes and she saw the well of water which was near to her. She filled her pot with water and gave the boy to drink (Gen.21:17-20). The complete fund ceasing paved the way for the indigenous church to see the local resources. The unexpected crisis brought another new vision and development to fulfill Christ's mission in a new chapter which gave true blessing.

It is believed that the ones who break out of poverty and really succeed are those who use what they have and are grateful for what they have. Basically, it is an attitude of self-belief and empowerment rather than one of self-pity and jealousy that is thought to combat the destructive poverty mentality. If they don't want to live in poverty, no matter how much they have, the first step in overcoming poverty mentality is becoming aware that they have it. Rather than concentrating on what they don't have compared to others, people started to focus on what they have. Being positive and building on what they have and relying on God with self-commitment can lead Christians to develop positive successes.

In contrast to this, when the church is not able to see her inward capacity and resources, whenever there is a challenge looking for help from outside is very normal. Unless the church is able to promote her local resources to carry out her work, she is not able grow mature. This does not mean that in times of crisis church should totally resist the assistance of another church as churches of Galatians sent aid to the Jerusalem in a time of famine(Acts 11:29-30). In New Testament time, churches were experiencing, mutual support, interdependence, fraternity, and solidarity. Mutual support is part of the very essence of an ecclesial 'communio'. Believers in the early church shared all they had in common (Acts 2:42). St. Paul collected material aid for the needy Jerusalem church (2 Cor.9:1-15), in the same way as he got a call for help (in terms of

personnel) from Macedonia (Acts 16:9). Individual Christians and local churches have through the ages benefited from the resources and talents of one another, realizing that the Lord's is the earth and the fullness thereof. Christians have always reminded themselves that they are one body in Christ, having different parts endowed with varied gifts and talents, which all must contribute for the promotion and well-being of the entire body of Christ.

The Idjaji parish which today the Central Gibe Synod had 13 permanent employees before 1993. These workers were fully paid by foreign funding, and also poorly paid. There were four small corrugated iron roofed church buildings or worship houses, one big brick church, and two grass roofed worship houses-totally seven church buildings. Each church building could hold up to 100-200 people and the big brick church building could hold between 600-1000. There were approximately 2400 members. All church buildings were fully supported by foreign cooperating partners. At present the synod has approximately 300 workers, their salaries are fully supported by local congregations, and also 173 church buildings, each could hold 500-2000 people. Today, the buildings are fully supported by local congregations. It seems as a blessing founded from nearby water well by indigenous people whose eyes were opened by God.<sup>93</sup>

#### 5.1.3.1 The strength of the CGS aspect of self-governing

The local church leadership should be run by indigenous leaders. Thus, the local church management should be turned from foreign missionaries to national leadership in order to promote self-willed and self-service development. Indigenous ministers and missionaries should work together in true love based brotherhood on the basis of genuine equality.<sup>94</sup>

The Central Gibe Synod was organized as a self-governed entity. It developed administrative structural units at all levels run by indigenous. It got its own constitution. It was fully supported by local congregations. It has its own structure of decision making, and it could appoint its own ministers and leaders. The synod administration has developed a healthy communication with its units at all levels. The unity and the commitment of all the synod ministers and congregations resulted in the opportunity of being self-reliant, because ministers and congregation members committed themselves to serve their congregations under the existing administrative structure at all levels. The synod administration task was not only making decisions, they were also visiting

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Diba Abetu, 18.07.2009.

<sup>94</sup> Harris, *Nothing but Christ*, 112-13.

to encourage and motivate the parish leaders, congregation elders and ministers to administrate and guard the church properties and Christian life as well.

#### 5.1.3.2 The strength of the CGS aspect self-propagating

According to Venn and Anderson's theory self-propagation is to carry out evangelistic work by indigenous Christians to their own people in a way that people may feel at home with the gospel. It is to lift up self-motivation and encourage the indigenous Christians to establish a church and evangelize other people, and in turn, these people would establish another pioneering church, in so doing the church is extended and expanded.

In the Central Gibe Synod the proclamation of the gospel was began by indigenous people in the vernacular language. The indigenous Christians carried on the evangelistic work with sacrificial ministry, through heroic faith. But step by step through tireless witness by laypersons and ministers from a single congregation many congregations were founded. As already accounted for the congregations organized into parishes, and in turn the parishes established the Central Gibe Synod. The synod has continued to extend its evangelistic work to the unreached area.

#### 5.1.3.3 The aspect of self-theologizing of CGS

According to Hiebert, self-theologizing has do with making an idea or theology understandable, useful, and relevant within a given culture. Indigenous churches should contextualize their church model and teaching to fit their particular society and situation. The fourth 'self-principle of self-theologizing is added to the three 'selfs' in order to develop indigenous churches in their own theology. It's aim is to set free from western theological colonialism and to make the gospel understandable and adaptable in order to communicate Christianity effectively in the context of the targeted people. In addition, the aim is to encourage and raise the ability of an indigenous church to read and interpret within its local culture, and also to develop the necessary responsibility and maturity for these tasks.<sup>95</sup>

In the case of the Central Gibe Synod, all in all, the church service was carried out in the local language. The charismatic renewal, motivated young people to sing in their local melodies and to proclaim the gospel. Especially the problem of foreign melodies which was not fit to the local culture's melodies was solved in developing a local one. Culturally Ethiopian young people have an ability to convey their feeling of joy, happiness and sorrow through local melodies. Hence,

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<sup>95</sup> Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 196-67.



they conveyed the dynamic power of the gospel in their local melodies. The spiritual song in the local melodies touched many people's hearts. Many young people were inspired to sing spiritual songs from their own melodies and to bear witness about the salvation of Jesus to their friends and relatives. New spiritual songs in the local melodies were created from time to time; and many non-Christians young people were attracted to the church. And also adherents of other religions were attracted to the church. On other hand, many laymen were motivated to be involved in the evangelistic work. They were diligently bearing witness to non-Christians. They felt that the Holy Spirit inspired them to serve the church voluntarily. Also the pastors and evangelists were inspired and more committed to serve the church more diligently than ever.

Generally, the teaching and challenging of Christians about giving part of their wealth back to God, their faith in God and their commitment to God's work, the life transformation, the ability of using local resources, the unity, willingness of the indigenous Christians, leaders and ministers created favorable conditions for the opportunity of the synod self-reliance.

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